35対魔導学園試験小隊

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"

柳実冬貴

12.黄昏の呼び声

ファンタジア文庫

Illustrations

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Member of Anti Magic Academy
"The 35th TestPlatoon"
杉波斑鳩
Ikaruga Suginami
対魔導学園高等部1年生／『鍛冶師』志望
■身長:167cm
■好きなもの:棒付きミントキャンディー、おっぱい、コスプレ、兵器全般、尖っている人
■嫌いなもの:運動、日差し、面白くない奴、努力
鳳 桜花
Ouka Otori
対魔導学園高等部1年生／元『魔女狩り』
■身長:168cm
■好きなもの:あんパンと牛乳、バイク
■嫌いなもの:お化け、水泳、魔法、魔女、魔法使い、魔導遺産
ラピス
Lapis
レリックイーター『ミスティルテイン』
■身長:135cm
■好きなもの:宿主
■嫌いなもの:湿気、自分以外の刀剣
西園寺うさぎ
Usagi Saionji
対魔導学園高等部1年生／『魔女狩り』志望
■身長:145cm
■好きなもの:苺のショートケーキ、紅茶、仲間、ボルトアクションライフル
■嫌いなもの:からい食べ物、緊張、天明路礼真
二階堂マリ
Mari Nikaido
対魔導学園高等部1年生(特待生)／魔女
■身長:158cm
■好きなもの:焼き芋、焼きプリン、焼き鳥、子ども、草薙タケル
■嫌いなもの:お化け、魔女というだけで差別する奴、巨乳(嫉妬)
草薙タケル
Takeru Kusanagi
対魔導学園高等部1年生／『騎士団』志望
■身長:171cm
■好きなもの:ラーメン、あんパン、山菜、剣、妹
■嫌いなもの:銃、剣術をバカにしてくる奴

対魔導学園
35試験小隊
12.黄昏の呼び声
AntiMagic Academy
"The 35th Test Platoon"
12.Call of Twilight

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Prologue

The moment her vision was blocked by a red wall, Ootori Ouka had seen it.

It had emerged behind Takeru, who made a twisted, shocked expression.

White skin with red variant wrapped around it. Black hair standing up on their ends. A crimson horn protruding from the forehead.

And, the chaotic eyes harboring hatred for everything in this world, have glared straight at Ouka.

Kusanagi Kiseki. Hyakki Yakou. Kusanagi Takeru's little sister.

There was not even a glimpse of Kiseki that Ouka knew.

All there was in her, was desire to kill.

The wall of meat blocked her path and Ouka was unable to reach Takeru with her outstretched hand.

"Kusana——"

Ouka tried to call his name, it was then.

【【【【【【"DON'T
TAAA

city she could see from the top of the hill.

Numerous demon pillars have emerged in the city from underground. The city that used to function as a country’s capital was made seem tiny compared to the growing pillars that protruded from the ground.

The pillars were like towers aiming for heavens. They outgrew buildings, extended above the clouds and undulating, they formed a huge tree that swallowed the city.

It all looked just like a world tree that appeared in mythology——

Being swallowed by the demon, the world, the atmosphere, the planet itself seemed to have raised a cry. As to cancel it out, the demon tree had howled.

——

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOooooooooooOOOOoOoOoOooOOoooooOOOOOOOOOO

It took a mere a fraction of a second to complete the scenery worth calling the “Apocalypse”.

Way too suddenly, way too fiercely, the end of the world had come.

The sky was stained red by the miasma spit out by the demons, turning the other side of the horizon hazy. The sky itself turned into a sea of red.

There were hardly any people remaining in the city. Still, how many people have been swallowed by the demons? She wondered.

Just like a catastrophe occurring abruptly, Hyakki Yakou swallowed everything in an instant.

Seeing the all-too overwhelming incarnation of chaos in front of her, Ouka nearly dropped her gun.

《“Master, keep thy sanity! Our fight is not ov’r yet!”》

“But…this…what do I do…?”

It was difficult for her to maintain her sanity.

With speed beyond comparison with the previous time it went berserk, Hyakki Yakou devoured the city.

What should she do against an opponent of this magnitude? Since Kiseki and Takeru had broken apart with each other, it didn’t seem like persuasion would work.

Hyakki Yakou was no more than a vortex of hatred. Chaos itself which devoured the entire world upon Kusanagi Kiseki’s wish.

Human instinct had whispered into Ouka’s ear.

Run away, it said.

『“Let me walk… by your side.”』

However, she recalled the words Takeru told her in prison.

I vowed I won’t let him bear the burden of Kiseki’s problem alone, haven’t I. I vowed to everyone that I’ll do what I can, haven’t I.

Ouka clutched Vlad’s handle, the trembling out of fear had changed into trembling of excitement.

What she could do——was to stay by Takeru’s side and protect his back.

She turned forward and glared at the wall separating her and Takeru.

I need to break through it no matter what…!

It’s not time to feel fear…!

“Vlad, can you go on?”

《“Of course. T’s thanks to the witch girl’s blood.”》

Ouka resolved herself and directed the muzzle at the meat wall.

The meat wall wriggled. Feeling Ouka’s hostility, its eyeballs have been filled with intent to kill.

It happened the moment she put her finger on the trigger and tried to turn into Dullahan form.

The wall of wriggling meat had taken a human form. First, it was a distorted meat puppet. However, it soon took the shape of a girl.

Before long it had grown long black hair and glared at Ouka with hollow pupils.

What the humanoid meat had formed was undeniably Kusanagi Kiseki herself.

“——!”

Ouka’s finger that was supposed to pull the trigger had stopped.

What should she combat was Hyakki Yakou and not Kusanagi Kiseki herself. She didn’t have the qualification to hurt the person herself.

She hesitated for just an instant.

And that instant——wasn’t overlooked by the Hyakki Yakou.

Kiseki’s hand had stretched and wound around Ouka’s neck.

“Hh…! Sto…p… Kiseki…!”

Hearing Ouka’s voice, Kiseki tilted her head, still expressionless.

The next moment, Kiseki’s shape had collapsed and it turned into red meat that was its source.

Ouka hurriedly squeezed the trigger. The stake was fired and blew away the Hyakki Yakou that was wound around her neck.

However, Hyakki Yakou flowed like water and circling around Ouka, it assaulted her from behind.

【【【【【【KYAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.】

It laughed as it didn't give Ouka time to turn into Dullahan form.

Laughing mockingly at Ouka's resistance, Hyakki Yakou swallowed her like a tsunami.

I'll become part of it once it touches me. Despite knowing that uncertain characteristic of the "Demon" ancient property, she could do nothing about it.

As she was swallowed by the sea of flesh, a voice full of resentment whispered into her ear.

"I'm not giving you Onii-chan."

Ouka realized that these weren't words of Hyakki Yakou, but Kiseki's herself as she was on verge of being completely swallowed.

＊　＊　＊

Usagi and Ikaruga who retreated along with Heretic Alliance were caught up in Takeru's secret art's blast.

After pulling out Mari from under the rubble, Ouka had immediately followed Takeru.

She left Mari to other platoon members and chased after Takeru by herself.

Mari who had remained in the back, prioritized rescue of her comrades.

"…Suginamiii! Usagi-chaaaaan! Kanaria-chaaan! I bet you're aliiiive anyway, so c'mon, answer alreaaady!"

Blowing away rubble with magic, she looked for Ikaruga and Usagi. She regenerated the limbs she lost during the fight against Mother Goose with her own magic power, but she was far from being in top condition. Regeneration was highest of high spells among of recovery magic and a very useful thing, but it was hard to call it as universal as that of a high level Magical Heritage.

It was unknown whether the feeling in her limbs will return in future.

As she looked around, she saw the Heretic Alliance's Dragoons working to rescue people who were blown away.

Mari herself didn't receive much damage since she put up a protective barrier on verge of being hit, but she didn't expect the blast to be so strong as to blow away the barrier itself.

"Mghh, gmghhhh…"

"Mggoh, mghoghhgo…"

When she turned towards the groan coming from the rubble, she saw Ikaruga covered in dust and lie face down. Below her, there was the appearance of Usagi and Kanaria, both flailing their limbs.

Ikaruga had twisted her body on top of the two, covering them.

“…I feel like vomiting.”

“Suginami, you okay?”

“Somewhat…”

Although there were no visible injuries, Usagi trapped below Ikaruga was suffocating with Ikaruga’s breasts pushing against her so Mari pulled them out.

“Pwah! …I was about to die with the cause of my death being “crushed by huge tits!”.”

“I could see Mama on the other side of the river…”

Breathing heavily Kanaria and Usagi put their hands on their chests.

They were unexpectedly energetic, but seeing the school’s buildings are gone, they were all in shock.

“…what on earth happened? We moved so far away and yet…”

When Usagi said that, Kanaria squinted and turned towards the cherry blossom forest Takeru was in.

“The secret art was used… I don’t know which one, but I think either Orochi or Takeru has died.”

“Died…?! How’s Takeru?!”

As Mari questioned her, Kanaria stroked Lævateinn’s blade.

“He’s probably safe. Lævateinn’s resonating in response to Mistilteinn.”

As Mari stroked her chest with relief, next to her, Ikaruga held down her hair and furrowed her eyebrows.

“…I don’t think it’s over yet. We defeated Valhalla’s top, but our real enemy is——”

It happened the moment Ikaruga said so.

Assaulted by the violent earthquake, their feet shook.

There was an uproar among Heretic Alliance and the platoon’s members also realized something.

As they listened carefully to the rumbling, they heard something like a faint laughter mixed in it.

“This is…!”

Hearing the familiar voice, Mari was horrified.

As all the members turned speechless, Ikaruga alone squinted calmly.

“…she has no hesitation at all, has she… just like her brother. What an outrageous little sister.”

In that moment, red color had mixed in among the rooftops far in the distance.

Splitting the ground it had toppled over buildings. The red mass of demons had covered

the city in an instant.

The people from Heretic Alliance had become as still as death, everyone in the location was stunned seeing the city collapse.

“…Hyakki Yakou… did Kiseki-san do this…?”

“Just like she told Kusanagi. She will kill all humans in the world and then kill us in the end. She probably started on it.”

As the city and the world had continued to collapse, a cry had resounded from all the variant.

The roar of the demons has turned into wind and stroked Mari’s cheeks and hair.

“Does she really intend to destroy the planet…?”

She heard about this from Takeru, but seeing it turn into reality was whole another thing.

It was completely different in scale and momentum from the first time Kiseki went berserk, which had turned into a trigger for them to leave AntiMagic Academy.

The city was swallowed in a moment and the demons have filled the sky.

Seeing such apocalypse in front of them, it was impossible to retain sanity.

Ikaruga held down her hair fluttering in the wind and looked at the collapsing city with a cool expression.

“That *girl was like this* right from the start. Just like Kusanagi she carries through with something once she says she will. Right from the start there was only hatred in her. She was just putting up a façade.”

The reason only Ikaruga was able to maintain her calmness was because she was always aware of the danger Kiseki was.

When Kiseki had escaped from the forbidden area and appeared in front of the 35th Test Platoon, Ikaruga told Kiseki this:

It’s wrong to blame someone else, she said.

Kiseki didn’t respond anything to that.

She only looked expressionlessly at Ikaruga who was reflected in the mirror.

Ever since then, Ikaruga had recognized Kiseki as an enemy, nothing else.

“Really, the type I hate the most.”

Staring at the world’s destruction, Ikaruga closed her eyes.

There was no longer anything they could do.

All there was in Kusanagi Kiseki’s world was her brother.

Ikaruga and the others didn’t have the power to stand against Kiseki and didn’t have any relation with her.

The only human who could possibly stop Kiseki was Takeru alone.

They couldn’t do anything.

——The 35th Test Platoon’s members were nowhere as wise as to think so.

“Ahhh c’mon, what the heck, Kiseki-chan you dumbass! This whole thing reeks of a huge mess! What about our desperate battle so far, huh?!”

“I should say, as expected of Kusanagi’s little sister… we get all covered in wounds just to get covered in wounds again soon after… I would like a little break first.”

While talking Mari moved her both hands and expanded a magic circle.

Usagi too, had filled Rabbit Fang with the remaining bullets she had.

Seeing the two, Ikaruga scooped up her hair.

“There’s surely something we can still do. We have to rejoin Ootori and kick that good-for-nothing Kusanagi’s ass.”

“Woah! Suginami is unusually full of motivation!

“I just hope it doesn’t turn into some kind of weird flag〜.”

“Don’t call it “flag”. I just wanted to say it once towards that little sister.”

The three confirmed with each other that they can still fight and were about to throw themselves into combat.

“……”

Seeing the platoon members act as usual despite the huge pinch the world was in, Kanaria was in huge shock.

Kanaria heard how horrifying Hyakki Yakou is from Orochi. It was an existence that could destroy the entire world depending on the main body’s feelings, a monster human beings could do nothing about.

A hundred and fifty years ago Orochi had fought against Kusanagi Mikoto as Hyakki Yakou tried to devour the world and the two struck each other down. As a result Kusanagi Mikoto had self-defeated herself by fusing with Mistilteinn, but if that battle continued the world would have undoubtedly been destroyed. Hyakki Yakou was an existence one could fight against only if they had the god-slaying sword and the demon-slaying Kusanagi Double-Edged style swordsmanship.

Although it was an opponent on a completely different level from human, they tried to confront it.

Truly foolish. It only made Kanaria think they were suicidal.

Still, despite that, when she compared them with herself who nearly accepted destruction without doing anything, she thought that was a much better choice.

Clenching Lævateinn’s handle, Kanaria had decided as well.

It was because there still was a person she felt like being with.

Resolving herself Kanaria tried moving next to Ikaruga——and it happened at that time.

——**thrwt…*!*

A rumble different from before had assaulted Kanaria’s feet.

Something——something was coming from below.

“Hey! ——?!”

At the same time Kanaria shouted, she grasped Ikaruga’s shoulder and tried to pull her to herself.

But at the same time, Ikaruga pushed Kanaria’s chest from the front.

As if tackling her, Ikaruga charged at Kanaria.

Blown away, Kanaria looked at Ikaruga speechless.

Ikaruga stared straight at Kanaria.

As she fell on her back, Kanaria stretched her hand out towards Ikaruga.

But the next moment——Ikaruga was swallowed by the demon pillar that had protruded from the ground.

Although Mari and Usagi could react in time, there was nothing they could do about it. The amorphous demon pillar had took away all three from in front of Kanaria in an instant.

Kanaria fell on her butt and stunned, she looked up at the demon pillar right in front of her.

When the pillar extended to be as tall as a building, numerous eyeballs appeared and looked down at Kanaria.

As if aiming for the place the 35th Test Platoon concentrated in, the crystallization of the demon had grown just there alone.

The demons narrowed their eyes and grinned, then stretched out tentacles towards Kanaria.

“Why…do you always… always, always have leave Kana behind…”

Making a strongly distorted expression——Kanaria gripped Lævateinn.

“————YOUUUUuuuu!!”

She tried to cleave down the tentacles with a sword, but a gunfire had echoed from behind her.

It was the covering fire from the Heretic Alliance’s Dragoons and Kanata’s “Nobunaga”.

Seeing the Heretic Alliance’s army, the demon pillar squinted and started returning to the ground.

Kanaria tried to chase after it, but Kanata ran up to her and grasped her shoulder from behind.

“Let go! She’s——!”

“You want to be swallowed as well?! We should pull back here! There’s nothing we can do!”

“Shut up! LET GOOO!”

Another pillar emerged from the ground beside the raging Kanaria and wriggling like a dragon, it assaulted Kanata and Kanaria.

In Witch Hunter Form, Kanata raised Kanaria up and retreated from the spot.

Although she was beaten by struggling Kanaria, Kanata prioritized what she should be doing.

Withdrawing with all of the Heretic Alliance and finding a safe place to hide in.

There was nothing Kanata and others could do now.

The city was filled with demons which have converged into a tree, as if to bless something.

It seemed like it was sucking out the planet’s life to grow.

The apocalypse has began.

The destruction is here and now.

Human feelings, even grief, all of it was being swallowed up——the Hyakki Yakou was bringing the end of the world.

Chapter 1 – What Do You Even Know About Me?

The Inquisition's First Branch in old Nagoya.

"——We have detected a large-scaled magical disaster in the region of the capital, the damage is rapidly expanding. Communication with the headquarters has been completely broken."

"——The mixed corps have bypassed Kantō's Sanctuary with goal to intercept enemy. After engaging the unidentified forces we lost communications with them."

The Inquisition's branch had directed reinforcements to the capital where a conflict had broke out with Valhalla, but they have been thrown into a state of extreme confusion as they received emergency call from the mixed force of Dullahans and Spriggans.

A Dullahan took post as a temporary commander in the Inquisition's branch.

"…What's happening?"

According to the Inquisition headquarters' order, the forces have all been focused in EXE, because of that the chain of command had fallen into disorder and the Inquisition responded to the enemy attack too slowly. They received orders from the headquarters to concentrate their forces in the Kantō region and have followed them, but since then there were no further news or response from the headquarters.

Although they didn't mind sending reinforcements, old Nagoya was absolutely packed with the refugees from the capital's region which caused the old Nagoya branch's movements to dull.

It was a situation where they couldn't even manage the communications.

The Chairman who should have been in the headquarters, as well as the executive board members who should be there were all missing.

"Learning what's the situation in the capital is the top priority. Did we get a permission to use the satellite yet?"

"Only the executive board can grant us permissions to use it, as long as we can't contact them…"

"…Then get some reconnaissance from other branches or from mass media or whatever! Get me some live video right now!"

A video was displayed from an area outside the capital, a thick red mist has been covering Tokyo and it was unknown what was happening.

There were no incoming information from the troops in the headquarters. As if matching the disappearance of the Chairman, not a single member of the executive board had responded to calls.

What they knew, was the fact that the headquarters were attacked by the Valhalla.

The communications with the reinforcements Nagoya branch sent has been interrupted mid-way as well. The last thing they have heard incoming were screams of the reinforcements.

The Inquisition branch could not move carelessly without prior information.

“——Commander, we have video from a single drone that has risen above the clouds!”

“Display it!”

As instructed, the operator had displayed the video on the huge screen in front.

After intense radio noise running through the screen a video from the drone’s camera had flowed**,** displaying the city center from up above.

Seeing the red color covering the ground and a huge tree that had its roots in the city center everyone had suddenly screamed on spot.

There weren’t many Inquisitors in the branch who knew about the first time Hyakki Yakou went berserk. Immediately after that the Border was invaded by the Pureblood Party so circumstances around that incident were unanswered.

While the majority of the Inquisition was distracted with Valhalla, Ootori Sougetsu had kept this monster tamed.

The temporary commander was covered in cold sweat after witnessing the devastation displayed on the screen and swallowed saliva soundly.

He was the only one in this place who knew about Hyakki Yakou’s existence.

He has learned about Kusanagi Kiseki’s existence before.

Guessing that Ootori Sougetsu has finally decided to use her in combat, the commander gave an order to the operator.

“Have the second troop return…! Cooperate with the other branches and make evacuating of the nearby residents a priority! Make sure to absolutely not attack it…”

His shocked subordinates gasped and returned back to work. No one even tried to to request an explanation from him. Seeing the video they understood that it wasn’t an existence they could understand even if they received an explanation. Trembling, the operator took contract with the second troop and forces from the other prefectures conveying them that evacuation is the highest priority.

The temporary commander clenched his teeth and gave out the next order.

“Flying Knight troop, squadrons 302 and 303… sortie.”

“B-but, we don’t have the authority…!”

“It’s an emergency. I’ll take all responsibility. The goal is the entire capital.”

“But there should be some more evacuees in the capital’s area…!”

“As if anyone would survive that…! There’s no choice but to purify everything above the ground to eliminate the threat… other branches surely made the same decision…!”

No. Even if the bombing is carried out, as long as a single Hyakki Yakou cell remains it will continue to grow.

But in order to prevent the erosion from going any further they could only do whatever they could.

The operator followed the instructions and had the squadrons sortie from the runway.

Despite knowing there was no hope the temporary commander looked as the aircrafts left.

"——?! Commander! The magic observatory is detecting an unspecified heat source underground…!"

"Give me location!"

"T-that's…"

The female operator took off the intercom and trembling, turned around to the commander.

"…b-below…us…!"

The temporary commander's pace turned pale all at once.

Then, the coffee cup placed on operator's desk started to rattle strongly.

The shaking has continued to grow stronger.

"It can't be… did she aim directly at Inquisition's facilities first…?"

In which case, the same thing must be happening in other branches.

Stunned, the commander placed his hands on the desk.

After a moment of silence, he relaxed his shoulders, closed his eyes and wiped off the sweat from his forehead using a sleeve.

Immediately after that, giant demon pillars have protruded from below the frightened operator.

Taking shape similar to a drill the demon pillar broke through the protective walls underground that were supposed to be made of anti-magic materials and have entered the branch's command room directly.

The Inquisitors started to run away screaming, but the tentacles grew from the pillars and mercilessly assaulted them.

The tentacles tore Inquisitors bodies' to shreds, as if to rip them to easy-to-swallow chunks.

Hyakki Yakou was overjoyed with the slaughter.

After finishing the slaughter of the Inquisitors, the pillars changed form transforming into what resembled a human woman.

A giant girl made of red meat extended her head towards the temporary commander.

The commander looked at the hell the control room has turned into before looking up at the demon incarnate.

“That girl… she’s controlling it, prioritizing the extermination….”

The commander saw Kiseki just once in the Inquisition’s headquarters.

The appearance of a girl locked in the deepest part of the deepest prison who was killed on a daily basis.

He has witnessed her power in the past.

And now, in front of him there was the incarnation of it.

While trembling in fear, the commander gave up on his life.

“……This is… retribution.”

Despite witnessing appalling things happening to the girl he accepted it as “something that can’t be helped” and abandoned his pride as the guardian of the law. He discarded morality and ethics pretending not to see what cruelty Inquisition was doing to the girl.

This was the retribution for that.

The retribution for abandoning this girl and trying to use her. The retribution towards Inquisition——and the entire world.

Commander has accepted death.

Just as he expected, the carnage happened not only at Nagoya’s branch but was happening at almost all Inquisition’s branches existing across the old Japan.

While devouring the planet, Kusanagi Kiseki decided to crush Inquisition preferentially, seeing their strength an obstacle.

The only remaining forces were the already-sortied aircraft and the surviving reinforcements directed to the headquarters.

In the empty control room the red dots displaying aircraft on the map have been disappearing one after another.

The aircraft squadrons that entered the Tokyo area have disappeared from the radar so quietly it was eerie.

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In the city being swallowed by the Hyakki Yakou, Kirigaya Kyouya continued to resist the impending death.

The endless mass of demons that overflowed and attacked from all directions wasn’t a liquid like before, but a solid mass.

The giant demon tree towering over the city had grown lumps looking like fruits, breaking out from these fruits were demons incarnate somewhat similar to Kusanagi Kiseki herself who descended on the ground.

Orochi had massacred the majority of the humans in the city, but there were some people who survived after escaping to the shelters.

In the middle of trying to rejoin Takeru and others, Kyouya had encountered Hyakki Yakou in the vicinity of a shelter with survivors and was stranded.

If he used the Relic Eaters' power he would be able to rejoin the Heretic Alliance.

However,

《"Hey, what's with this good person act?! Just leave this bunch and prioritize your own life, Master!"》

"Shut up! Stay quiet you shitty gun!"

Spitting curses, Kyouya pulled Nero's trigger to the limit.

The incarnate demons formed by the Hyakki Yakou were stupid, but no matter how many he killed they continued to regenerate and jump back at him again. Moreover, not only they didn't single-mindedly try to kill him, but they also were disciplined to an extent and tried to avoid his attacks.

Probably majority of Hyakki Yakou's power was directed under the ground in order to devour the planet.

The entire Tokyo's surface was being engulfed in the Hyakki Yakou, but he had no idea how much was it eroded beneath the ground.

There was no doubt that this huge tree intended to devour the planet's core and then eat up the surface all at once from inside.

These demon incarnations were a vanguard, something like soldier ants protecting the queen.

"I told ya dammit! You should have killed her when you could, Kusanagi!"

It was pointless to fight, there was no end to them.

Still, Kyouya continued to remain at the entrance to the shelter.

He felt himself to be ridiculous. Before, he wouldn't care less about the civilians, he was the reason the first time Hyakki Yakou went berserk.

He didn't feel he had to atone for that. He couldn't care less about the bunch immersing themselves in the temporary peace given to them by Inquisition.

It was just that if he abandoned the shelter here, his childhood friend would surely be disappointed with him.

Thinking so, he couldn't bring himself to run away.

《"You're so damn weak towards women! If this is to be the case it would be much better if you remained with the Inquisition!"》

'Shut uup! You are no better when it comes to dealing with Akira, you coward!"

《"Huhh?! I'm just bad with the type of people who won't listen to you whatever you tell them! You're the coward here!"》

Despite being exhausted during the fight with Einherjars, Kyouya had to deal with Hyakki Yakou's army one after another in quick succession.

The demon incarnation roared and swung down its right arm.

Unable to respond Kyouya clenched his teeth, that's when a rust-colored magic bullet struck from the sky blowing away the demon's arm.

Kyouya clicked his tongue and looked up to the sky where a boy in red clothes was riding a broom-type flight device and a girl with a spear floating in the air.

It were Sage from the Pureblood Party and Yuzuho from the Gods' Embers.

"You safe?"

"Seems like your Magical Heritage has poor fuel consumption."

Seeing the two worry about him, Kyouya spit out curses.

"Stop doing needless things, damn heretics."

"No point bothering about heretics or whatnot at this point, is there."

Sage sighed at Kyouya who glared at them and listened to the voice coming from the intercom on his ear.

"…Our squad and the Sixth Guard bunch are transporting survivors to the shelter. Other members of the Heretic Alliance who split up with main force and the Inquisition survivors, although there isn't many of them, are dedicating themselves to rescuing and evacuation of the citizens."

"Hah, here I thought it turned into a ghost town, but the people here are as stubborn as cockroaches."

"The reason the alliance's arrival was delayed in the first place was giving priority to civilians' evacuation. It seems like Hyakki Yakou only eroded this city on the surface but…"

It's unknown how long will that last.

Sage shook his head as if to get rid of his anxiety and jumped from the flight device, landing beside Kyouya.

Yuzuho too had descended, landing beside Kyouya.

"Thinking is pointless now. It's no longer possible to evacuate the citizens out of the shelter and outside the city.'

The three stood back to back, Yuzuho holding a spear, Sage expanding a barrier made of rust. Thanks to shutting out the attacking demon incarnations with barrier, Kyouya was given some time to rest.

"You did well protecting this place alone. You're quite something."

"While unwilling, I shall lend you my strength. We'll protect this shelter together."

"Don't you dare ordering me. What about your comrades?"

"No need to worry about my subordinates. The Seventh Squad isn't as weak as you might

think.”

“I would like it if you didn’t underestimate the Sixth Guard.”

Squeezing out their remaining power the three entered battle readiness in front of the incoming demons.

The barrier made with the Rust attribute was strong, but the Hyakki Yakou has broken through it already.

“In this situation there’s no point bothering who’s friend or foe. Can we expect some reinforcements from other Inquisition branches?”

“It’s not like I’m an Inquisition either, I’ve no clue. I bet the branches won’t move as long as the shitty Chairman in the headquarters doesn’t order them. I bet they’d just bomb this place in order to stop this all.”

When Kyouya answered, Yuzuho concentrated magic power on the tip of her spear.

“Hmph… would they think a mere bombing would change anything?”

The situation was hopeless, one the original plan didn’t apply at. They were unable to contact Hoshijiro Nagaru who was the leader of the alliance, and no one knew where was she.

Since the chain of command has collapsed they decided to do whatever they could, but at this rate the situation would just deteriorate.

Something had to be done about Kusanagi Kiseki who was the source of Hyakki Yakou.

“So it’s up to Kusanagi, huh.”

Hearing Sage’s mutter, Kyouya spat out laughter.

“It’s pointless to expect anything out of him.”

“I wonder about that. I think he’s a guy who unexpectedly manages to do his job.”

“Tracing backwards, he’s the cause of this catastrophe. It’s because he’s gone selfish and didn’t kill his little sister.”

“Is that so? Then even more so I can expect things of him. He’ll finish this while feeling responsible.”

“What’s with that positiveness, you’re so annoying.”

“Same to you, you negative bastard.”

“——Could you stop arguing in this situation?”

Yuzuho stopped the two from insulting each other and they have raised their weapons.

“I’ll focus on defense. While I’m chanting, you two stop the demons. Can you do that?”

“Easy job.”

Kyouya raised Nero up and a magic circle appeared beneath his feet.

“I wanted to leave this magic for that motherfucking Necromancer but… it doesn’t seem like I can.”

“You mean intrinsic magic, do you…”

“Hey, you guys stop breathing or you’ll die.”

Kyouya got down on his knees and struck the magic circle with Nero’s barrel.

Pulling off the grip he fired Nero and reloaded.

Momentarily, magic mist has diffused from Nero’s muzzle and dark green particles have spread in the air.

Just as told to, Sage stopped his breathing and watched Kyouya’s attack.

《“The poison type?”》

“The enemy ain’t witches. Can’t just suppress them, we’ll go with infection.”

《“So we’re attacking enemy who erodes everything with infection huhh. It’ll be seriously magic power-consuming and I don’t think it’ll be too effective, either?”》

“Just do it.”

Kyouya released Nero from the ground and directed the muzzle towards the demon incarnations who passed by Sage’s barrier.

There were ten demons total. Behind Kyouya and others there were tightly shut shelter’s doors. The road was wide and it was impossible to kill them all at once with Nero’s buckshot.

In the middle of dark green fog, Kyouya squeezed the trigger.

“《Babylon》*”

The moment he spoke the magic name, the magic circle broke into pieces and tiny particles scattered in the air——have all flowed assaulting the incarnations at once.

The tiny particles of magic in the air attacked the demons like a shotgun shot.

They were countless tiny magic bullets.

It was hard to say that alone would be effective against Hyakki Yakou.

Even a large number of tiny bullets piercing through enemy didn’t have much of an effect. This intrinsic magic didn’t have power to blow the enemy away.

But the true value of this magic, just like it’s name implied*, was not its destructive power.

Nero’s magic attribute was “Poison”.

The demons stopped for a moment after their bodies were pierced by the particles and seemed like they will immediately resume their activity, but something like a dark green mold had appeared from inside them and started spreading.

The incarnation’s regeneration stopped and the mold gradually spread.

“So this works too… so not only it’s unable to erode magic power and magic, but also poison.”

Kiseki’s body was immortal, but it was possible to kill the Hyakki Yakou that was detached from her body. So to say, they’re like every cell of hers that’s a living organism

in itself. They're able to spread erosion, but a single cell each didn't hold much strength.

——Poison magic that continuously delivers damage was in a way a natural enemy of Hyakki Yakou.

Although Nero's "Poison" had the only non-ancient attribute among Relic Eaters, it held power over poison from various other attributes. Poison magic was capable of infecting enemy and the damage spread for as long as the magic isn't exhausted.

The demons' proliferation could be offset by infecting them with poison.

Even if they can't be beaten, their expansion can be stopped.

That's what Kyouya was aiming at.

"The magic itself can only buy us time, but while their erosion is stopped we can kill them all we want."

Kyouya smiled and changed Nero's form into that of a tonfa.

"Restraint, is it. That really sounds like Inquisition's tactic."

Before Kyouya could, Yuzuho had assaulted the demon incarnations. Even without receiving the strengthening from the rearguard her spear attacks were enough to kill enemy with her skill and magic power.

The spear tinged with magic power had cut apart the demon incarnation and shone with white light.

"Guards' Spearsmanship——Eternal Septuple Flash!"

In rapid succession Yuzuho delivered seven blows to the seven demons whose movements stopped.

The ones who were pierced by the spear had light come out from inside them which wrapped around them, as if purifying them.

Not allowing a drop of blood stain the blade Yuzuho rotated the spear and poised it very low.

The incarnations have immediately surged, but Yuzuho remained in the same posture and did not move.

At that time Kyouya rotated in the air above Yuzuho and let out an intense blow at a demon.

"I ain't dyin'——as long as she's waiting for me to come back, I'm invincible!"

With Sage's support Kyouya and Yuzuho stood up against a demon army.

"……"

While maintaining protective magic, Sage organized the current situation.

The Heretic Alliance's goal was initially to find Mineshiro Kazuma's documents, but since the Second Dullahan War* had started the situation had taken two or three turns.

After Kusanagi Orochi and Mother Goose were defeated with great pains, the Second Dullahan War was terminated.

However, the whereabouts of the essential person Ootori Sougetsu was were unknown and without giving them a moment to rest, Hyakki Yakou has appeared.

He could only think that they all danced on top of Sougetsu's palm. If Ootori Sougetsu really is this world's God, it wouldn't be strange if he kept track of what all of them are doing.

His goal was the destruction of this world and if that means his own death, this situation could be said to be going according to his plans.

Sage looked towards the hill the academy was in.

"…The only way for us is to entrust everything."

Right now, they could only pray.

＊ ＊ ＊

——Kusanagi Kiseki and Kusanagi Takeru met inside a very, very dark box.

In the valley at the bottom of the mountain there was a small box-shaped warehouse. That was the only place Kiseki had, the only world she knew.

The inside of that warehouse made out of anti-magic materials was always filled with the smell of blood.

The red liquid that caused the room to smell was all her own blood.

Once every three days without fail, Kiseki was killed by the hands of her own father.

She heard the reason for that from her father. Kiseki knew her body was a product of an abominable curse and a "demon" the Kusanagi household has destroyed in the ancient times.

If the demons accumulated inside Kiseki weren't forced out and killed every few days the world would have been exposed to the demon threat. And in order to force the demons out, it was necessary to kill Kiseki.

The face of her father when he cut off her head was always filled with bitterness and sorrow.

Forgive me. Please forgive me. I'm really sorry.

Those were the only words spoken to Kiseki by her father.

Girls born to Kusanagi were to be put to death immediately after birth. The Kusanagi household has strictly obeyed these commandments. The moment they have learned the child to be born is female they were to perform an abortion and if it's too late, the child is to be killed along with her mother.

They learned Takeru had a twin right after birth.

Kiseki had *attached* herself to her brother's, Takeru's body. She reduced her body to a level of a cell and parasitized his body. It must have been the vengefulness of the demons' curse that has done it. In order to be born again in this world, the demons had given her *a false birth*.

According to her father, right after birth Kiseki's body rapidly expanded and massacred everyone in the Kusanagi household aside from her mother, father and older brother.

You aren't to blame. I'll take all the blame on myself.

That's why forgive me, said her father.

Kiseki from back then did not know what was she supposed to forgive her father for.

To Kiseki, *a father was an existence that kills his daughter*, that was natural to her.

She did not hate her father. Not just that, she didn't even know the emotion called "hate".

Her mother had worried about Kiseki at first. Gave her a book, spoke to her.

But after her father and mother quarreled outside the warehouse, her mother no longer spoke anything to her. No matter how much Kiseki spoke to her, her mother wouldn't respond. Just, from time to time she came over and sang a lullaby from outside.

That's what family was to Kiseki.

That's what was normal to Kiseki.

Everything changed when she met Takeru.

She understood the circumstances around her were abnormal.

She understood she was a pitiful existence.

She had become aware of love, she had become aware of despair, she had become aware of the feeling called "hatred".

The meeting with him was the beginning for all of it.

Listening to his stories she couldn't help but yearn for the outside world. She had become aware of her own misfortune and couldn't help but seek happiness.

Above all, she couldn't stop herself from wanting to meet Takeru.

Even so, Kiseki couldn't bring herself to betray the tears of her father who killed her so many times or the singing voice of her mother who tried to act like her parent, even if just a little bit. She told herself that she is an existence that shouldn't exist, one that shouldn't go to the outside.

After all, that's what her father continued to tell her.

Told so, she had been killed time after time.

And yet, the reason she was unable to accept the death given to her by her father was,

『"I'll take you out of there."』

『"I want to meet you, I want to be by your side."』

『"I will save you. I promise."』

Because Kusanagi Takeru had shaken up Kiseki's heart.

Just how high expectations did Kiseki have of his words.

Just how big of an existence was Takeru to Kiseki, who knew nothing of the world, knew nothing of other people.

The only person in the entire world to be her ally. Someone who would love her.

The person who would kill her.

Takeru was Kiseki's entire world.

But that also why her hatred when she was betrayed was——

"Unlike Onii-chan, Kiseki fulfills her promises, you know?"

Kiseki said that to Takeru who, at loss for words, stared at the huge demon tree that appeared in the city.

Jumping from on top the piled up mass of meat, Kiseki landed in front of Takeru.

Still speechless, Takeru stared at her.

Kiseki joined her hands behind her back and peeking into Takeru's face, she smiled brightly.

It was an unclouded, innocent smile.

"I need to keep my word. First Kiseki will kill all people in the world, then splatter people Onii-chan holds precious. Kiseki will work hard until there's only Kiseki and Onii-chan left in the world."

"……"

"It takes more time than I thought it would, sorry. Earth really is big. It seems like it'll take some more time to swallow it all."

Her body clad in red a dress, Kiseki did a twirl.

Giggling, she spread her words as if to bless the world that was being devoured by demons.

"See, it's the first time since Kiseki was born that she feels this good. I didn't think I would be able to move my own body so freely and see on my own eyes how the world I hate is destroyed."

"……"

"And above all, I can be with Onii-chan… no, I can be with *Takeru-kun* in the same place, inhale the same air and face each other like this. There's nothing more wonderful than this."

Ahaha.

Ahahahaha.

Ahahahahahahahaha.

Kiseki laughed merrily and monotonously.

“Hey, Takeru-kun. Can you hear? Just listen. You can hear the screams and cries of the people in this land. You see, Kiseki has aaaallllwaaays wanted to hear this. While Kiseki was killed in the darkness time after time, dozens of times, hundreds of times, thousands of times, she continued to hear the sound of happiness from the outside. Happiness, sadness, affection, hate, love, urge to kill, Kiseki always heard the hearts of various people in the dark, dark place.”

“……”

“Kiseki who could only experience death always wanted to hear this.”

Takeru didn’t know whether that was anger, delight, or both.

She continued to laugh. With tears in her eyes she celebrated the achievement of her long-cherished wish.

After laughing for some time Kiseki placed a hand on her chest.

“Once this tumult is over Kiseki will be able to rest… when the only sounds in the world are Kiseki’s and Takeru-kun’s, and the two disappear, Kiseki will be finally saved.”

“……”

“You didn’t know, did you, Takeru-kun? You didn’t know what to do to save Kiseki, right? I think that can’t be helped. The reason Takeru-kun took all the burden on himself was because Kiseki didn’t do her best.”

“……”

“But now that Kiseki did her best you know it, right? This is Kiseki’s salvation. Hey, Takeru-kun… Takeru-kun? Are you listening?”

“……——!!”

“Takeru-kun Takeru-kun Takeru-kun Takeru-kun!”

Kiseki opened her eyes wide and shouted angrily.

And,

“Give up already and save Kiseki.”

Bloodshot eyes embedded in the mass of meat in the surroundings all glared at Takeru.

Takeru faced downwards and clenched his teeth.

Seeing his chagrined expression Kiseki stared with gaze full of love.

“Ahaha. You’re making a wonderful expression, Takeru-kun. Kiseki wanted to see Takeru-kun’s face like this. You must have understand just how irrelevant the things you did so far were.”

“……”

“I hate you, Onii-chan. I love you, Takeru-kun. And——

【【【【【【【【【【【“Serves you right.”】】】】】】】】】】】

Hyakki Yakou and Kiseki speaking overlapped.

Kiseki’s lips expressed love and hate, as she laughed with ridicule at Takeru.

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As Takeru watched Kiseki laugh innocently, feeling fear and love, his determination on the brink of fading, he clutched the sword’s hilt.

One could blame Kiseki without end.

What have you done, he could say.

Just how many people have you killed during just this moment.

He could throw out words forcing them on her without end.

But he knew what would she answer if he tried cheap preaching like that.

——It’s all because Onii-chan didn’t kill Kiseki.

——This is all Onii-chan’s fault.

Surely, that’s what she would answer with.

However, *that’s* not why.

It was because what Kiseki would say would be *true* to an unbearable extent.

That’s why he didn’t blame her.

This devastation was all his fault.

He had two chances to kill Kiseki.

The reason he didn’t do it was because he chose Kiseki’s and his comrades’ lives over those of some strangers in this world.

This devastation was merely the result of his choice.

He had nothing to excuse himself with, nor had any intention to.

Takeru shouldn’t respond by blaming Kiseki, nor respond to her twisted love.

Serves you right.

These are the words he should respond to.

“——You’ve grown a really bad taste, Kiseki.”

Ignoring all the lives that were lost in this moment, Takeru laughed.

Kiseki’s smile disappeared at once.

“Bad taste? I guess so. That’s the person Kiseki was in the first place.”

“Whether it’s Master or you, I think you two should think about the surroundings more. Just how selfish are Kusanagis, really. You’re being inconveniencing others.”

“Are you one to talk, Takeru-kun?”

She furrowed her eyebrows a little bit.

Takeru erased his wry smile and shouldered his sword.

“Among Kusanagi I think I’m more on the side that knows moderation y’know? At the very least I’m a better *human* than you or Master.”

Takeru announced boldly.

It were his true feelings. While being aware he was an egoist, aware he was more irresponsible than anyone else, he said what he honestly thought.

What are you talking about, you’re the biggest inconvenience here.

He laughed at himself, but he couldn’t help it since it were his true intentions.

——Huh?

Kiseki made a comical expression that made him feel like he heard her respond with that.

“I don’t understand well what you’re talking about, Takeru-kun… the reason Kiseki does this, the reason why she turned like this, the origin of it all is——”

“——It’s all my fault. So what?”

Hitting his shoulder with the back of the blade, Takeru raised his chin.

“Well, it’s my fault that the world *has* become like this, but you are the one who did this to the world. Sorry, but Nii-chan intends to shoulder only his own part. It’s your choice to destroy this world.”

“…That’s sophism.”

“It might be worth a fart and smell like shit but it’s logical, it’s true. I have no intention of following your choice. I’ll resist it with all I have.”

“……”

“I’ll save you, save my comrades, and while at it… well, it looks pretty bad now but it ain’t too late, I will save the world to finish this entire case.”

He swung the sword from his shoulder and pulled half of his body back.

His gaze was directed straight at Kiseki.

Kiseki was expressionless, but her hair have bristled up slightly.

“Why do you go so far to deny Kiseki salvation?”

“Obviously, *because I want to.*”

“……”

“Even if you’re unconvinced, I will go through with my way of doing things.”

Slowly he raised the sword horizontally and pointed the tip of it at Kiseki.

The azure blade sparkled under the sky reddened with fog spat out by demons.

Like melting ice, Kiseki’s expression was slowly tinged with hatred. Her tears disappeared and she furrowed her brows with anger.

“…You’re selfish, Takeru-kun.”

Hearing her squeeze out these words, Takeru smiled.

“You didn’t know that I’m selfish, have you.”

“……”

“You didn’t know that your beloved *Takeru-kun* was such a horrible *big brother.*”

“……”

“Hey, Kiseki. You said earlier that you love me, but what is it about me that you love so much?”

As if responding to his words, Hyakki Yakou wriggled.

He couldn’t feel the intent to kill. The only thing he felt from it was anger.

“…Why do you ask such a thing despite knowing Kiseki’s feelings…?”

Takeru responded to the discomfort he held for the way Kiseki called him.

Kiseki didn’t call Takeru “Onii-chan” but “Takeru-kun”. It was how she called him when they met for the first time and didn’t know they are siblings yet.

Even Takeru knew what does that mean.

He knew Kiseki’s feelings best of all. He was aware of them for a long time.

Kiseki didn’t think of Takeru as of her brother, but as just another person.

As another person, she saw him as object of romantic interest, love.

She rejected her Onii-chan and accepted the so-called “Takeru-kun” from the past.

In other words, it was forbidden love. He didn’t feel it to be disgusting or off-putting at all, he thought himself a lucky brother to be loved by his little sister.

But he couldn’t be honestly happy.

Takeru will respond to that forbidden love of Kiseki’s.

“——So, what do you even know about me?”

As Kiseki was at loss for words, Takeru continued without mercy.

“I know… after all I’m Takeru-kun’s——”

“Little sister, you’re saying? Yeah, you are my little sister. But just like I don’t know anything about you, you don’t know anything about me.”

“…That’s…”

“It’s natural. The time I spent together with you, the time we spend as siblings, was very short.”

When they first met they were separated by a box and could only speak with each other. At the time he also went to school and had swordsmanship practice, leaving him few time for that.

They learned they are siblings when Kiseki went berserk massacring the villagers and was caught by Inquisition.

Then they met only once or twice in two months for just ten minutes. Just like when she was in the box, they couldn’t touch each other.

If put all together, how much time would that make?

At worst it would be just about a week, wouldn’t it?

What could they know about each other when that’s all their relationship was.

Until now, Takeru took actions he thought are natural as her older brother.

He faced Kiseki holding such feelings.

Just like towards his comrades Takeru played his ideal of “Kusanagi Takeru” as a decent human, he also played his “ideal older brother” towards Kiseki.

That’s why he didn’t know anything.

Takeru knew nothing about Kiseki.

There’s no way he could unconditionally accept love from someone he knows nothing about.

“Kiseki.”

“……”

“That’s why I said we should have a fight. Without mercy, without holding back, just you and me. I couldn’t care less about others, this problem is yours and mine.”

This was Takeru’s answer towards Kiseki’s feelings.

Kiseki remained speechless, she staggered slightly swaying her hair.

——Then once again, she glared at Takeru from the bottom of hell.

Takeru smiled fearlessly and accepted all her anger.

“If I learn about you, understand your feelings and fall in love with you, I’ll die together with you.”

“……”

“You learn about me and think if I’m someone worth dying together with… ascertain that I’m a man you can say you love from the bottom of your heart.”

“……”

“And if both of us by chance come to the same conclusion… we’ll live together.”

Grasping the handle he firmly poised the sword.

It wasn’t in order to kill her. It was to understand her.

To have a fight with her.

It could be said that this was the first time Takeru bared his feelings to Kiseki.

Right now Takeru didn’t lie or deceive her, he didn’t put up a cool act, threw away his ideal of a big brother and faced Kiseki as just another person. Kusanagi Takeru, stained with desires, ego and pride.

Kiseki chagrined and held her head in her arms. Hyakki Yakou squirmed, raged as if to reject Takeru’s words.

But Takeru didn’t intend to have mercy on her.

He couldn’t care less if she screams and cries in order not to listen. He’ll have her surrender with the swordsmanship for killing demons and will scream his feelings to the human Kusanagi Kiseki’s ears.

He’ll force his ego on her.

“Prepare yourself——Nii-chan is helluva strong in fights.”

Cladding himself in armor, Takeru confronted her.

His troublesome little sister in her rebellious phase.

“…ghh, I don’t know, I don’t care, I don’t want to hear this…! Takeru-kun wouldn’t say such things…! Kiseki doesn’t need anyone but Takeru-kun she knows! If Onii-chan won’t become Takeru-kun, Kiseki will bring Takeru-kun back!”

“Fine by me! Try your best, Kusanagi Kiseki!”

The demons cried, Takeru roared.

Takeru ran towards the looming Hyakki Yakou and swung his sword.

Not in order to kill.

He swung his sword in order to make her understand.

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*Kanji says “Evil Leaden Woman”. “Evil Woman” is written with 毒婦, which includes the kanji for “poison” as well. Also a Hellsing reference (Babylon is written as Beiberon, like it was spelled in Hellsing).

*Previously it was called Witch Hunt War, this is the first time it’s been called Dullahan War.

Chapter 2 - What Do You Even Know About Us?

＊ ＊ ＊

For some reason, Saionji Usagi was in her own room in the Saionji residence when she woke up.

“Good morning, Usagi-ojousama.”

As she raised herself from the bed, the maid that stood beside the door had bowed respectfully and greeted her without any emotion.

It was the same morning as always.

The same, unfulfilling morning.

Her brother’s death was blamed on her, her grandparents and sister died of illness and father *passed away in an accident*, and she was blamed for causing all of this to happen by just being alive. In this house, Usagi had no human rights. She only tired herself out when she tried to resist it, and ended up abiding her relatives.

That’s right.

She was unable to choose her way of life. That is Saionji Usagi’s existence.

It is now, it was in the past, and will be in the future.

“…Good morning.”

Usagi returned the morning greeting to the maid, got off from the bed and sat down by the dressing table.

I looked at my doll-like face as I combed my hair.

Today, I turned eighteen.

It was the last day I stay in this house. From tomorrow on, I’ll be in Tenmyouji household’s care.

The wedding will take place in a week. After school I need to dress myself up and go greet Tenmyouji’s relatives.

The person she was to marry, was either the second or third son of the Tenmyouji household Usagi knew since young age. Although she is marrying into Tenmyouji household, the contract states that the children she bears will take on the name of Saionji and will be welcomed back to Saionji household in order to become the household’s heirs.

Rather than a tool for political marriage, Usagi was treated as a tool for birthing the heir to Saionji household.

Her husband-to-be was a man who mentally cornered Usagi ever since they were young, as if it was his hobby. Whenever she went to Tenmyouji house, she was always treated cruelly.

“……”

She combed her long hair freely and not feeling especially sad, she indifferently spent the morning same as usual.

Honestly speaking, she was accustomed to this kind of treatment. Even after becoming a Tenmyouji, her situation didn’t change much.

She had already tired herself out crying and screaming from sorrow in this house.

And she no longer cared about it.

After Usagi finished combing her hair she stood up and walked towards the closet in order to take out her clothes——that’s when her hands stopped.

“……?”

Her hand grasped nothing.

It should have been there, her favorite uniform.

Strange. It should be there.

No matter how many times it was washed, it always smelled of mud, soot and gun powder, the uniform that put her through a lot——

“Ojou-sama, I have prepared your clothing.”

The maid had brought her a uniform.

A navy blue uniform of the Central Girls’ Academy.

“…Oh, that was it.”

She must have made a mistake. There was no way her uniform could be in the closet.

Usagi took the uniform from the maid and stood in front of the mirror.

Trying it on herself, she stared intently at mirror.

“……”

And furrowed her eyebrows.

Was this the color of the uniform she always wore?

Was it so neatly-looking?

Usagi turned her head slightly, full of questions that wouldn’t go away.

“Um…mm?”

As she looked at her own reflection, tear drops spilled from her eyes.

Although she wiped them off with her fingers, tears continued to flow without end.

She didn’t know why was she crying. There was nothing wrong, yet a thought that something is amiss wouldn’t disappear from her head.

Usagi closed her eyes, desperate to recall something.

Before she noticed, she was inside a church, wearing a wedding dress.

Wearing a dress that was somewhat familiar she stood in front of the main altar.

That’s right… today, there is my wedding…

After immersing herself in vague memory, she was reminded that today was the date she marries the Tenmyouji household’s scion.

When she turned around, she saw the Saionji and Tenmyouji households’ relatives in the seats. Most likely no one would bless this marriage.

Everyone expressionlessly stared at Usagi and the groom.

Usagi slumped dejected, and unable to shake off discomfort she faced forward. The priest spoke words of the oath, she could hear what he was saying, but she couldn’t grasp the meaning of his words.

She looked to the side, and saw the groom hidden in the shadow of the daylight coming in through the stained glass.

…Who… was it again?

The groom noticed Usagi’s gaze, his mouth alone seemed to form a smile.

The priest continued to mutter some words. When she looked up, she saw a cross decorating the center of the stained glass.

A cross.

Strange. Were churches permitted to decorate themselves with crosses in this world?

She had no idea why she thought this, but she felt there was a law concerning that.

“Do you vow?”

The priest sought the words of an oath from them. Those were the only words I could hear clearly.

“I vow.”

After the groom spoke, it was Usagi’s turn.

Usagi opened her mouth, but she couldn’t mouth the words.

No, she didn’t. She didn’t want to.

She didn’t want to make the vow.

“I…”

When Usagi tried to honestly speak what she felt, the groom pulled her to himself.

Forced to turn forward, she saw the groom’s face closing on for a kiss.

Unable to find strength in her body because of fear, Usagi ended up surrendering herself.

The groom’s face closed on her, the blonde man made a twisted smile on his face.

“What is it? Usagi.”

She remembered. She didn’t have her memory, but her body and soul remembered.

This face. This voice. The smile that terrified her ever since she was young. She remembered them.

“——Hurry up and vow, Usagi.”

On the verge of their lips touching, Usagi saw the groom’s face clearly.

Yes, that was it.

She remembered.

This man, he was——

He’s my——enemy.

——*whud*!

Ignoring the fact her skirt was rolled up, Usagi delivered a right hook with all her strength to the groom.

Starting with his head, the groom was blown away and ended up crashing into the wall.

“…hmph!”

Usagi lifted the hem of the dress with both hands and sent a look of despise to the fallen groom.

The people on the seats started to make bustle and Usagi’s relatives showered her with jeers.

Not paying any regard to the noisy audience, Usagi tore off the wedding dress’ hem that made it hard for her to move in.

“Usagi-san! What are you doing?!”

Ahh, another familiar voice.

The main culprit who blamed the death of Usagi’s siblings on her. Another enemy.

After she finished breaking the dress, Usagi struck the altar with both her hands and all her strength.

The church turned silent once more.

Usagi vigorously turned back to the seats again and puffing her chest, she glared at everyone.

“What is this charade supposed to be?! I won’t go back to being my old self with something like this! I will decide my life by myself! You have no right to get in my way!”

And shouted. Her memory was still ambigious and she couldn’t recall what was she doing just a while ago, but in this situation she clearly understood this wasn’t reality.

“Quit with the charade, how about you face me directly?! Are you lacking the courage to even do that?!”

She didn’t know who was it, but Usagi yelled at the one who crafted this situation.

No matter the reason, no matter the goal, it was done too cleverly.

Usagi felt like she had many things she held dear, but for some reason she was missing the memories of them. Most likely the one who created this situation must have intentionally falsified her memory and perception.

But she didn’t give in.

The attachment to something, and a bond with someone didn’t allow Usagi to give in.

They reminded her, that she was no longer weak.

This kind of farce was no longer able to overcome Saionji Usagi.

——*giggle*, *giggle* *giggle* *giggle*…

Hearing a voice behind her, Usagi turned back vigorously.

There, was a black haired girl clad in dress made of red meat, sitting on the altar. She was embracing her knees as she stared at Usagi, seeming as if she had been there right from the start.

When their eyes met, the figure of the groom who crashed into the wall and her relatives in the seats have all disappeared. All of Usagi’s memory also returned.

Recalling her comrades and the battle so far, Usagi glared at the girl in red dress – Kusanagi Kiseki.

“So it failed〜. Kiseki doesn’t know much about weddings, so she couldn’t do it too well…”

“……”

“But, it was a nice try wasn’t it?”

“You’re really… Kiseki-san aren’t you?”

Kiseki put a hand on her mouth and giggled merrily.

“Yup, Kiseki is Kiseki. It’s been a while, Saionji Usagi-san.”

There was not a slightest resemblance to how she used to be. Kiseki wasn’t a girl who would laugh so innocently. She used to be like a child lacking confidence, who laughs in a timid manner.

“Ehehe, so, how was the nightmare just now? You see, Kiseki was made sleep and shown nightmares all the time, so she thought of making Usagi-san suffer the same way and had these little ones grant that wish.”

“…This is a dream, isn’t it. Did you make it?”

“Yup, amazing right? I’m so great〜.”

Kiseki grew tentacles from beneath her feet and rubbed her cheek against part of the stretched Hyakki Yakou as if it was a cat or a dog.

She tamed Hyakki Yakou like it was a pet.

The appearance of her rubbing her cheek against this variant was full of madness.

“…Isn’t killing us your goal?”

“Yup. I will.”

Kiseki answered with a smile.

“But before I kill Usagi-san and others, I need to kill other humanss in this world. It doesn’t seem like Takeru-kun will kill Kiseki unless I do that.”

“……”

“But Usagi-san’s first. Among Takeru-kun’s comrades you’re the one who feels most distant, the weakest.”

Flapping her legs as she sat on top of the altar, Kiseki swayed the tentacles.

Usagi faced downwards and clenched her fist.

“…I wonder, what is the meaning of this dream?”

Hearing Usagi’s question, Kiseki shook her hair and smiled.

“It’s to erase Takeru-kun from inside Usagi-san.”

“……”

“I imagined the future in which Usagi-san didn’t encounter Takeru-kun and made this dream with it. I allowed the little ones erode Usagi-san just a little bit. Kiseki received aaalll of Usagi-san’s memories with Takeru-kun.”

Usaig furrowed her eyebrows.

Kiseki opened her eyes narrowly and looked at Usagi with eyes so dark, jeebies ran over Usagi.

“——Your past is hardly painful, yet you have Takeru-kun act so kindly to you. Isn’t that unfair?”

And before long, Kiseki smiled and started to flap her legs again.

“Kiseki thought of having her little ones erasing Usagi-san’s memories directly from her brain, but it seems they can’t move that well yet… and if it fails, you’ll die.”

“……”

“That’s why I make you endlessly see nightmares in order to make you understand there was no Takeru-kun in the first place. Kiseki intends to take your life in front of Takeru-kun, but can’t forgive Takeru-kun existing inside you.”

She leaned forward and while saying “I’m sorry”, Kiseki stretched.

Usagi raised her face just slightly and glared at Kiseki.

“Kiseki will do better next time. Make lots of situations, see? She thought of things〜. What kind of thing would be good? Painful? Bitter? …Kiseki knows a loooo〜〜〜〜〜〜〜oot of things that are painful, so look forward to it.”

“……”

“I will be so painful, so harsh you won’t be able to think anything. I’ll show you I’ll definitely make Takeru-kun disappear from Usagi-san.”

Kiseki giggled, the laughter from before returned.

Before Usagi realized, the walls and the floor of the church turned into red meat.

The laughter sounded from the wall and Usagi’s body sank into the sea of meat.

Flapping her feet, Kiseki looked down on sinking Usagi.

And Usagi has——

“That is something impossible for you.”

Still glaring straight at Kiseki, she raised her chin.

“Because, Kiseki-san knows nothing about me.”

“That’s not true. I mean, the little ones taught me all of Usagi-san’s memory.”

Seeing Kiseki act triumphant, Usagi looked at her with pity.

“You can’t understand people with just their memories… their strong and weak parts are engraved into their hearts.”

“Heart? Human body’s heart organ doesn’t have anything to do with their mind, y’know? You learn about people by examining what’s inside their head.”

Kiseki waved Usagi bye-bye.

Usagi didn’t look away from Kiseki until right before her body sank in completely.

“There is no way that your wish will be accepted by Kusanagi, no matter what.”

Leaving that behind with certainty, Usagi closed her eyes and was swallowed by Hyakki Yakou.

“……”

Kiseki left behind in the church watched the ripples marking where Usagi sank in, then erased her expression.

The “her” in this dream was merely part of Hyakki Yakou, but it was connected to Kiseki’s main body.

Hyakki Yakou and Kiseki have already become one existence. Even if this was just part of Hyakki Yakou, it was no different from Kiseki herself.

It wasn’t multiple personalities, it wasn’t consciousness division, it was the real world’s Kiseki that was here.

Kiseki turned over Usagi’s words in her own head, closed her eyes, and headed over to the next dream.

＊　＊　＊

——In the Border’s Grey City, Nikaido Mari stared at the capital burning red.

The terrorist attack with an Einherjar and Ghouls had succeeded, and Valhalla’s goal of opening up the forbidden area went well. The Inquisition’s headquarters were devastated in no time from the inside and soon after, the capital was destroyed by the berserk Hyakki Yakou in just a blink of an eye.

So far, Hyakki Yakou had finished swallowing up Eastern Japan and was spreading to the West. The Inquisition side that had tried to fight back from the West was attacked by Pureblood Party using transfer magic, and got into a pincer attack.

The complete destruction of old Japan was merely a matter of time. The witches lurking inside the Sanctuary were aiming to cause this situation.

Since Mari was inside the Grey City in a place close to the Sanctuary, she managed to escape the invasion of Hyakki Yakou.

The only safe place in the East was a slum near the Sanctuary.

“……”

Mari was aware that this devastation was all her own fault.

Her promise with the Valhalla which said they won’t involve civilians has been broken. It must have been planned. The Valhalla had executed this plan because they wanted to destroy the Old Japan right from the start.

Of course, Mari blamed them for the fact they broke the promise. I don’t remember agreeing to help with this, she said.

However,

『 “Mari-san, I don’t think you have the right to blame Valhalla, am I right? You put the children from the orphanage and the Inquisition on a scale, and chose the children.”』

『 “…That’s…!”』

『 “Moreover, the non-combatant members of the Inquisition were involved in your balancing. For example, people affiliated with Inquisition have parents, siblings, wives and children. Whether they are Inquisitors or not, the weight of life is the same.”』

『“……ngh.”』

『 “Rest assured, you didn’t kill anyone. But since you won’t do it yourself, I have no

choice but to kill innocent people. I respect your will to avoid killing but… I wonder who whose view would be more sinful from a general public's perspective?"』

Valhalla's executive with whom Mari was cooperating said so with a serious expression.

Although he was a man who enjoyed slaughter with a frivolous smile, Mari was unable to refute him.

『 "I ended up bullying you a little… But Mari-san, whether you're sinful or not is not the problem. The war has already begun. What's left is to learn who'll win and who'll lose, it's a battle deciding who'll live and who'll die. You too are in the midst of a battle, focusing on what's most important to you is surely, absolutely, the right thing to do."』

『"……"』

『 "Your anguish and anger are just. You are right. Please stay that way until the very end, until the very moment you die."』

The man said so, made a complacent smile and disappeared from in front of Mari.

A month had passed since then, and old Japan continued to remain in chaos.

Just as the man said, Mari could no longer go back. Once she dirtied her hands with blood, they'll stay dirty no matter how much she washed them.

She continued to put things on a balance.

She'll sacrifice many innocent people until the children captured by Valhalla come back.

Mari closed her eyes tightly and threw away the rest of the belief inside her.

"…Found them."

She looked at the survivors walk in from the Border to the Grey City and sent a message through magic communication to Valhalla troops lying in wait for an ambush. There was a short answer and the sorcerers waiting for an ambush started moving, aiming for the evacuees.

The evacuees were all in tatters. They must have seen something unimaginable. They seemed like living dead. Although the remnants of Spriggan have protected the column of the evacuees and remained wary of the surroundings, they completely lost the will to fight.

《"Understood. We shall begin the attack."》

While listening to the magic communication, Mari looked down at the column of people from the roof of an abandoned building.

Mari was puzzled by the fact she's cooperating with Valhalla.

——How did it turn out like this?

Hiding her mouth behind the muffler, she faced downwards.

I get it that I can't turn back now… there might be no other way, but…

Something isn't right.

Something's strange.

It wasn’t strange that the world turned like this.

She looked up while making a displeased expression and scratched her head over the hat.

“So strange… was I a woman who’d be satisfied with a situation like this?”

Something strangely irritated her.

It wasn’t this situation, but her memory what irritated her.

The children from the orphanage were taken hostage, so she cooperated with Valhalla which resulted in large amount of victims during the Einherjar terrorist attack.

Things up until that point were fine. The events came together well.

But stuff ahead of that was weird.

“Me… this Nikaido Mari, continuously cooperating with that scum?”

Somehow, she thought it impossible.

She thought that doesn’t work for Nikaido Mari.

Certainly, what that scum said was correct, but would she repeat the same mistake over and over again just because of that?

Mari folded her arms in front of her chest, unable to restrain her irritation she repeatedly tapped the ground with her foot.

The people walking in a column saw the ambushing sorcerers appear, she saw them gather in the center of the road.

Valhalla had no mercy for the civilians. At this rate they would be brutally killed.

She glared at the situation below, then lowered the hat right over her eyes.

“But well, since it’s come to this it can’t be helped. Ahhh, damn, I’m unexpectedly no-good, aren’t I!”

After putting her foot on the roof’s edge, she jumped directly to the ground.

The moment sorcerers tried to attack the evacuees, Mari created a magic circle and concentrated magic power in her both hands.

“If I was doing something unlike myself——I just need to get myself back!”

She released the magic converged in her both hands all at once.

Although the sorcerers on the ground noticed the surprise attack, they were blown away by the bullet exploding in front of them.

Mari then landed in front of the evacuees, swiped the muffler over her shoulder and confronted the sorcerers with look of confidence.

The sorcerers quickly rose from the ground and yelled at Mari saying “traitor” and “are you taking humans’ side?”.

Mari snorted soundly and aimed her finger at the sorcerers as if it was a pistol.

“I’m no one’s ally. I’ll just do whatever I want to do.”

——You've been obedient all this time, what's with you after all this time.

The sorcerers showered Mari with jeers.

That's true, it's just as they say, Mari ridiculed herself.

It took her really long. Despite helping out with horrible things so far, changing her mind all of a sudden was the height of indecisiveness.

But unless she did this, she wouldn't be Nikaido Mari.

Nikaido Mari up until a moment ago must have been a lie, or a mistake.

"I'll save whom I want to save. I won't kill anyone. That's me."

You don't care what happens to the children? Asked the sorcerer.

"What are you talking 'bout, obviously I'll save them! I'll get them back from you folks by force!"

Mari made the magic circle huge and approached the sorcerers.

She moved forward without hesitation, her muffler flowing in the wind.

"I'm a little late——but from here on Mari-chan is going to turn seeeerrrrioooously scary, so prepare yourself!"

Mari broke into a run in accordance with her true self.

But that moment, the sorcerers have suddenly disappeared from in front of her.

Nearly falling over because of the remaining momentum, Mari blinked repeatedly. The evacuees behind her also have disappeared.

Instead, there was a lone girl wearing a red dress standing in the middle of the road.

Mari recalled everything. The events in this world were all wrong. She recalled who did she meet so far, with whom she deepened her bonds with and what was she fighting with.

"…Kiseki-chan? Eh? Why…?"

"So Mari-san was actually quite the simpleton."

"Shooock!"

She ended up saying.

Moreover, she was looked with a little of scorn. That surprise attack uncharacteristically hurt Mari.

Unable to grasp the entire situation, Mari put a finger between her eyebrows as she tried to organize her memory.

She remembered now. Right after the fight with Mother Goose, she was swallowed by Hyakki Yakou.

In other words, the girl in front intended to kill her.

But for some reason, Kiseki stopped herself from doing so on the verge of it. There probably was a reason for that, but the fact was that she stopped.

So there was one thing for Mari to do.

“…Kiseki-chan. I don’t know what kind of situation is this, but can I say something first?”

“Whaat is it?”

“Try to understand how Takeru feels.”

There was a lot she didn’t get, but she said the thing she wanted to say the most to Kiseki.

Mari thought that telling her that was the only thing she could do.

But to Kiseki, these words were the greatest taboo of all.

“…Why does Kiseki have to understand…? It’s Takeru-kun who broke the promise.”

“That’s true. But do understand. There is nothing wrong in what he’s doing.”

Hearing Mari say that indifferently, Kiseki finally flared up with anger.

Like a child she started to stomp her feet on the ground and furiously faced Mari.

“——Why?! Onii-chan doesn’t know anything about Kiseki! Just how painful did she feel, how sad she was to be betrayed, he understands none of it! Then why is Kiseki supposed to understand Onii-chan?!”

Kiseki’s shoulders shook with anger as she yelled.

In response to her anger, the world was enveloped in demons. Buildings, cars and rubble turned into Hyakki Yakou and directed eyes full of anger at Mari.

The demons roared, caught Mari with outstretched tentacles and raised her up.

But Mari was unfazed. She took on Kiseki’s rage and continued without mercy.

“Why, you ask. It’s because that way everyone will be happy. You will be happy as well, Kiseki-chan.”

“……”

“If it turns out like you want it to, everyone will be unhappy. Everyone will die. There’s no way that happening would be any good.”

“…everyone, everyone you say, but that won’t make Kiseki happy! You’re speaking selfish!”

“Selfish? Right back at you.”

Mari shrugged.

“Takeru doesn’t want to kill you, Kiseki-chan, nor wants to die either. You hate the world so much you want to die together with Takeru. Both of you are super selfish.”

“……nhh.”

“But I’m on Takeru’s side. Actually that was all I wanted to tell you, Kiseki-chan. Understand how Takeru feels. That is all.”

She smiled bitterly at glaring Kiseki.

“I get it that no matter what I say, you won’t listen. I just said my reason for sticking with

Takeru. Honestly speaking, I don’t know in the least how Takeru feels about you. I mean, this is Kiseki-chan’s and Takeru’s problem.”

That’s why, Mari added and smiled gently.

“Have a proper fight. Just clash your feelings against one another.”

Kiseki looked downwards, her fist trembled.

Although these words sounded like she pushed Kiseki aside, Mari understood that these were the only words she had for her.

By talking with her like this, Mari was able to understand just a little about Kiseki.

This girl just… doesn’t know anything.

It oozed from every and each of her words, that’s what Mari concluded seeing the emotions that were suppressed so far.

Mari could clearly tell her anything she wanted.

Don’t involve the world in your personal problems, she could say as if it didn’t involve her.

But Mari wasn’t as stoic as to tell something as harsh to a *child* who was only ever allowed to die.

Above all, surely the one who is to say that to Kiseki, was Takeru.

Hyakki Yakou’s tentacles wrapped around Mari started eroding her.

And Kiseki only continued to glare up at Mari.

“No matter what you say… Kiseki won’t change.”

“I know. Takeru’s the same. You two sure are siblings.”

Siblings. Told so, Kiseki glared even more intensely.

Mari knew Kiseki got angry hearing that.

Because that was the thing she wanted the least.

“…Kiseki wants only Takeru-kun… she doesn’t need Onii-chan…!”

After closing her eyes sadly, Mari was swallowed by Hyakki Yakou.

…It’s up to you… Takeru…

There was no guarantee that she would continue to remain safe like this.

Mari had no way of doing anything about this situation.

That’s why right now, she could only entrust everything to Takeru.

* * *

——When Suginami Ikaruga woke up, she was in the genetic engineering's control room inside the Alchemist's research facility.

On the other side of the control room's glass window, there were water tanks reminiscent of a giant test tube.

Inside all of them, there were successfully restored dark elves.

Number-wise, there was a silly number of a thousand of them.

Four years have passed ever since the first restoration. The alchemist has reached the phase of mass production and were able to make practical use of dark elves as weapons.

The first dark elf was handed over to Valhalla, and has devastated the Inquisition's headquarters in the capital.

Valhalla showed off the power of dark elves to people all over, making humans fear them. Humans could do nothing against that but to surrender.

The witches who were living inside the Sanctuary have invaded old Japan and requested the Western branch of Inquisition to surrender, but Inquisition had refused.

In response Valhalla used the dark elves as a forceful measure.

But Alchemist had also provided dark elves to the Western branch of Inquisition.

The reason for that was simple.

They wanted battle data of dark elves battling other dark elves.

It was just as Alchemist speculated it would be. The dark elves didn't function as a deterrent, old Japan's has literally ceased to exist with exception of Kantō, Tōhoku and Kyūshū regions.

The remaining land was filled with magic disasters caused by elves. After losing the purification systems they were no longer suitable environment for humans to live in.

It could be said that old Japan was completely destroyed.

"With this, we have all the data on dark elves… what do we do next? Ikaruga."

A woman wearing a red lab coat next to her, had looked towards Ikaruga.

She couldn't see her face well, but it was clear the woman was smiling merrily.

"What is it? You should rejoice more. With this we can move on to the next study subject you know?"

"……You're right. I'm glad."

"Fufu, I heard some nice information. America's Magic Academy apparently has gotten their hands on a Lost Matrix of a high elf, until now we've only found their fossils."

"……"

"It's high elves you know? An S-class designation only mentioned in legends. If we restore them we'll reach even greater heights."

Seeing the woman frolic like a child, Ikaruga awkwardly smiled.

It wasn’t that she wasn’t happy. For her, who lived only for the sake of research this progress was a great achievement.

To Suginamis research was everything. To them, the research process was trivial compared to the results, and the opportunity to start a new research was said to be a bliss

She would be achieving even greater heights together with the one she shares blood with. There was no reason no to be happy.

And yet…

For some reason Ikaruga didn’t feel satisfied.

“Hey… is this really all right that we do this? Does it really match us?”

“? What do you mean by that?”

“…I don’t know. But, something is… lacking.”

When Ikaruga said this, the woman laughed in amazement.

“Well, of course. We won’t be satisfied with just this much. Next time we’ll tackle something more difficult. But let’s rejoice over this first.”

Although the woman was correct, Ikaruga was unconvinced.

She stared at the inside of the familiar laboratory.

It was an inorganic and cold place smelling of medicine.

…What am I missing…?

The countless number of dark elf fetuses which could be said to be the product of madness.

…No… it’s not “missing”…

Ikaruga placed her hand on the glass window and traced towards the closest dark elf fetus.

She compared the elf sleeping inside a cramped water tank to herself.

“It’s cramped.”

“……What?”

“This place, it’s cramped.”

The woman didn’t understand what was Ikaruga saying and looked puzzled.

Ikaruga didn’t know why did she think so either.

She lived her life like this up until now and never questioned her way of living, but for some reason she felt this place was too cramped.

Ikaruga stared at the woman as she worriedly peeked into her face.

Although she was unable to see her face clearly, looking at her for some reason made her incredibly lonely. Despite the fact the woman was in front of her, it felt like she was far, far away.

Then, Ikaruga placed a hand on the woman’s cheek.

Seeming worried, the woman placed a hand on top of Ikaruga's hand.

"…What's happening, Ikaruga?"

"Hey, let's leave this place together."

"? What are you saying? This is our only home. There's no other place for us."

"You can make any place your home. We'll just make the place we go to our home. Anywhere would be better than this."

"……Ikaruga?"

"Please, let's escape this place together."

Placing a hand on the woman's shoulder, Ikaruga tried to persuade her.

But she only stared at Ikaruga and did not say anything.

Ikaruga took her hand off the woman and took a step back.

…I feel like… I told this woman the same thing before…

She was unable to find anything in her memories of the past, but she couldn't help feeling it.

"Sorry… I'll go alone."

A single tear droplet spilled from Ikaruga's eye.

She turned around on her heel and without wiping the tear, she started walking in the opposite direction of the woman.

"Ikaruga… where are you going? Do you intend to leave this place?"

"……"

"Wait. Here is where you're supposed to be. Don't go anywhere."

"……"

"Don't leave me, Ikaruga."

Hearing the voice desperately try to stop her, she felt her chest tighten.

Despite that, Ikaruga did not stop walking. Leaving her other half behind, she shook off the voice stopping her and walked away.

This is no longer your home, her heart screamed.

She didn't know where was it, but she ought to have another home.

Someone should be there, waiting for her.

That's why she had to go.

After she opened the door to the control room, Ikaruga turned back to the woman and spoke.

"Bye bye… Isuka."

And carried her foot to the other side of the door.

The moment she left the control room——her vision went pitch black.

Surprised, Ikaruga stood in the darkness.

The memories inside her head started returning. She recalled various things, as if she had woken up from a dream.

Her thoughts rapidly cooled off. She recalled that the parting with her other half, her tears, were all a farce. She felt as if she was dirtied.

Ikaruga laughed, mocking the master of this world.

"…It's pointless no matter how many times you try, Kusanagi little sister."

Feeling a presence behind her, Ikaruga turned around.

Kiseki wearing a red dress looked in her direction with hatred in her eyes.

"You show me a dream to imprint false memories… it might seem a lot of time has passed, but in real world about two minutes passed, right?"

"……"

"Not even Hyakki Yakou can't erase other other people's memories. Well obviously, it would be a different case if they eroded them and made them part of itself, but *I'm not part of you yet*. Hah, what a farce. No matter how many times you do this the result will remain the same."

"…Why…?!"

While Kiseki groaned in chagrin, Ikaruga scooped up her bangs and approached her.

Then, after looking at her from above she brought her face really close to Kiseki's.

"As long as I'm me it won't work no matter how many times you try, you silly thing."

"……"

"Is this the thirtieth time? You ought to learn something already."

Kiseki clenched her teeth frustrated.

Ikaruga smiled faintly.

"Let me tell you this. I won't spoil you like Usagi or Nikaido."

"……!!"

"I mean, even before all this happened, I hated you right from the start."

When she snorted, Kiseki stretched out tentacles from beneath her feet and tightened them around Ikaruga's neck.

They tentacles weren't tightened too strongly. There was no intent to kill. Even inside a dream Ikaruga couldn't any murderous intent from Kiseki.

Just as she declared to, she probably intends to kill them in front of Takeru.

That was probably the case.

But Ikaruga had another idea as for why Kiseki wouldn't kill them despite being able to…

the reason why she *won't kill them*.

She just coldly stared at Kiseki who bared her hatred.

"Angry? Then why not just kill me?"

"You don't have to tell me, I will. But I will kill you in front of Takeru-kun…!"

"Did you know that threatening your prey like that is pointless?"

Ikaruga ridiculed Kiseki and laughed.

"Hey, do you want me to tell you the real reason why you won't kill us?"

"……?"

"Think well. Y'know, even if you kill us now that will make no difference to Kusanagi, right? I'm sure you know that."

That this is just a farce. Ikaruga said with a smile.

And,

"The reason you won't kill us is——because you actually don't want to be hated by your dear, beloved Takeru-kun, do you?"

"————Nhgh…!"

Kiseki who kept strangling Ikaruga was at loss of words. Hyakki Yakou's movements stopped for a moment.

Ikaruga noticed that, and once again laughed at Kiseki.

"Your plan to have Kusanagi's hatred directed to you alone because you want to monopolize him is a lie. If you kill us, he really will only hate you. Rather than a little sister he loves, you will be an enemy to take revenge upon. You'd hate that from the bottom of your heart, right?"

Pupils in Kiseki's wide open eyes shook with anger.

"You don't want it to end and die while being hated, right? You actually want to die while still being loved by him. You want a double suicide while remaining the cutely cute Kiseki-chan."

"That's not true… Kiseki wants…"

"If you don't care about appearances, be more thorough with it. Throw away love and such. Now you only continue to flap your mouth like a half-hearted little bitch. Since you're not killing us because you don't want to be hated by Kusanagi, you probably thought of making us suffer with this farce. How silly, it's so obvious. Not only you're a stupid brat, but also a small fry."

"W-what do you even know about Kise——"

"Hahahaha, you think I don't?"

Ikaruga’s gaze that seemed to see right through Kiseki made her anger reach the apex.

The tentacles strangling Ikaruga’s neck were released and the moment she thought her freedom returned, Kiseki herself held Ikaruga’s throat.

“You don’t understand not a single thing about Kiseki…!”

“You getting angry… is the proof I’m right.”

“Shut up! Stop acting as if you know anything about Kiseki!”

“Or what will you do… kill me…?”

While strangling Ikaruga, Kiseki had pierced her body with multiple tentacles. Although this should have been a dream, the pain of being pierced was real.

“I’ll have you taste Kiseki’s memories…! I’ll let you experience the same thing Kiseki has experienced until now…!’

“……”

“And then, you’ll stop acting so arrogant…! Surely, you’ll feel the same Kiseki feels…!”

Tentacles started eroding her, and Ikaruga’s body became part of Hyakki Yakou.

“But you won’t be able to do anything! No one will ease you or help you! All alone you will just continue to die until the world ends…! I will teach you… just how painful, how sad that is…!”

“Haa… So, you want others to understand you?”

Even at this point, Ikaruga further provoked Kiseki.

“You want others to understand you, so you’ll just force your memories on others… what a kid. Like that, you won’t win the fight against Kusanagi.”

“You insolent——!”

Suddenly, Ikaruga extended her hand towards Kiseki’s cheek, distorted with anger.

Kiseki’s body stiffened completely.

“Go on, force your memory on me. If after experiencing the same thing I admit defeat, I’ll apologize to you while crying and even prostrate miserably in front of you. But if I remain the same after having the same experience, then——”

Ikaruga stroked Kiseki’s cheek and smiled fearlessly.

“——I’ll mock you again.”

At the same time her hand slid down Kiseki’s cheek, Kiseki swallowed her with Hyakki Yakou.

Until the very end, Ikaruga continued to look down at Kiseki from above.

＊ ＊ ＊

“Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Heavenly Evil Spirit!”

Unsheathing the blade at once, he cut down the demon incarnations.

Physical attacks weren’t damaging Hyakki Yakou too effectively. However, high-speed attacks while in Soumatou generated a shockwave which had the power to blow away the demon cells away from the cut surface.

After using the technique Takeru lowered his body, turned the blade around as it nearly touched the ground and bent his knees in chi-no-kamae before using his legs as springs at full power.

“——Pipe Fox!”

And at the same time he leaped, he swung the sword upwards.

The blade slashed the demon into the jaw from below, cut apart its brain and blew it apart.

Kusanagi Double-Edged style’s Pipe Fox was a primitive form of True Light style’s Wolf Blade. It served to fool the enemy and make them think the user has weakened, tricking them into attacking by jumping from above.

Similarly to Mantis Slope it was a technique for attacking from surprise, a technique to recover from a hopeless situation by aiming at enemy’s vitals.

Of course, when it fails the user exposes himself to attacks, after its usage the user is defenseless in mid-air which made it a suicidal technique.

Currently, Takeru was surrounded by Hyakki Yakou. A huge wave of demon incarnations flocked towards him from all over.

Takeru sheathed the sword in the air and slid the sheath to the back of his waist.

“Lapis——Spin us!”

《“FM Booster, full throttle.”》

Just as Takeru instructed, particles of magic blew from the gaps in the armor. They ejected from only Takeru’s right side.

He rotated in the air like a top.

“Double-Edged style——Single Wheel!”

The omnidirectional sword draw technique was used in a state where it shouldn’t have been possible. At the same time it was unleashed, the sword extended to length of meters and rotated like a propeller.

Takeru’s body maintained high enough pace to hover in the air and blew away all the attacking demons.

As if he was a center of an explosion, all the Hyakki Yakou around Takeru was blown away opening an empty site.

But Hyakki Yakou had immediately rushed at him again.

Their numbers equaling infinite have gathered at where he landed.

“Zweihander!”

《“Understood.”》

The moment Lapis stopped ejecting magic power inversely to rotate them, the blade has transformed into a several tens of meters-long zweihander. Takeru twisted his body forward and swung the sword while tilted towards the ground.

“Mantis Slope!”

——*thudd*!

Takeru’s strike crushed the flooding Hyakki Yakou.

The ground had repeatedly rose and caved in as the shockwave ran over the school grounds.

“……”

On top of the raised ground, Kiseki coldly stared at Takeru’s unparalleled display.

Even when the cloud of dust cleared up and Takeru emerged from inside, Kiseki remained expressionless.

Takeru slowly walked towards Kiseki while shouldering the sword.

“…Lapis, is magic power all right?”

《“There’s still plenty of headroom in normal Witch Hunter mode.”》

“Sorry, keep with me for a little longer.”

《“…The problem is Host’s body.”》

He already noticed it even without Lapis saying this.

His body exceeded the limit long time ago, but on the contrary to that his speed and power increased significantly. As it could be seen when the demons attacked, even in Witch Hunter mode his attacks shouldn’t have that much destructive power.

The reason he was able to exert such destructive power was because his body didn’t feel pain. Normally when he used techniques he could predict how much recoil was his body subjected to, and naturally restrained power.

Right now, Takeru was unable to do that, nor intended to.

Currently, he was unable to even feel the load of Soumatou. Every time he used a technique surely his bones were crushed and muscles must have burst. The reason he was able to move despite that, was because Lapis made healing of his body the highest priority.

Takeru’s brain had the part responsible for pain completely burned off.

It would probably never heal.

He felt really apologetic for making Lapis worry about his body.

“I’m sorry… really sorry.”

《“…Please, don’t apologize. I know.”》

Any more words were needless.

Lapis knew how Takeru felt best of all.

She knew the best that despite having his body turn like this, Takeru couldn’t afford to withdraw.

《“Do as you please… I won’t stop you. After all, you have continued to fight all this time, for this moment.”》

“Thank you.”

After saying his thanks, Takeru approached within ten meters of Kiseki.

And confronted her without hesitation.

“Yo. Is this *chambara play* going to last long?”

“You’re amazing, Takeru-kun.”

“Is that sarcasm? It doesn’t make me happy to be praised by someone who fights me without intent to kill.”

Takeru told Kiseki with resignation.

Kiseki too, faced with Takeru with resigned expression.

“But Takeru-kun doesn’t have the least intention of killing Kiseki either.”

“Yeah, I should’ve told you at first. I won’t kill you.”

“If you don’t die with me, the world will be destroyed and people precious to you will die, you know? As long as Takeru-kun dies together with Kiseki everyone will be happy, why not understand that?”

“In your ‘everyone’ there’s no me, or my comrades.”

Tapping his own shoulder with the back of the blade, Takeru glared at Kiseki.

“Same to you, why did you go and make ridiculous amount of trouble for other people, then didn’t accept salvation? You could have become a normal human and lived a normal life. Everyone would be happy with that, there was no reason to refuse was there?”

When Takeru asked, Kiseki made an exhausted smile that caused wrinkles under her eyes.

“‘Cause, there’s no salvation for Kiseki in that.”

“There is. You would become happy.”

Her smile was tinted with bitterness.

“…You say the same thing Mari-san had said.”

“……?”

“——Kiseki will decide what’s her happiness. Don’t decide for me, Takeru-kun.”

The two’s wishes differed.

Neither of them budged an inch.

Their wishes… no, it might not have been something that pure.

That wasn't the case right from the start.

The two just did whatever they wanted to do. That's about it.

They intended to carry through with it.

Fighting was completely meaningless. It was natural that neither of them intended to kill the other.

But it could be said that Takeru was overwhelmingly disadvantageous in this fight.

Kiseki put a finger on her lips and giggled.

"Takeru-kun, do you really understand what your selfishness means?"

"……"

"I will teach you what not dying together with Kiseki means."

She moved her finger away from her lips and slowly raised her slender arm to the sky.

——Then swung it downwards at once.

Takeru intuitively understood what that gesture meant.

He felt like he heard screams he shouldn't have been able to hear.

"Just now, three thousands of people have died."

She moved her hands behind her back and shaking her hair she said.

"Did you understand? Kiseki doesn't lie."

"……"

"And now, two thousands."

Kiseki combed her hair as she said that.

There was a sound of earth squirming far in the distance. Kiseki listened to that as if it was classical music.

Takeru furrowed his eyebrows.

"How pitiful. Part of Kiseki did it in an instant so that they don't suffer, but she could tell everyone's fear as they disappeared. It's natural, since they became part of Kiseki."

"……"

"It's Takeru-kun's fault for being stubborn. Once Kiseki makes this planet hers, she'll probably swallow all the people on the surface at once. It will be Takeru-kun's fault for that happening."

Hearing her words, Takeru faced downwards.

Seeing him clench the sword hilt, Kiseki closed her eyes a little satisfied.

However, Takeru has,

"Stop doing pointless things."

Declared Kiseki’s actions pointless.

She tilted her head, puzzled.

“Pointless? Takeru-kun, when you heard Kiseki killed a lot of people you were upset, right? You felt guilt because a lot of people died because of you? You probably have. Then it wasn’t pointless. If you want to stop Kiseki, you just have to fulfill the promise.”

Kiseki spread her both arms wide, her eyes weren’t laughing.

The city visible from the hill was completely filled with red demons and there was no remnant of it.

The giant demon tree continued to grow, as if sucking out the planet’s life.

Although it wasn’t long, he recalled the days he spent in this city. Although they were days full of battles, it wasn’t all bad things. There were several good memories of it.

He didn’t want it to be destroyed.

If possible, he would like to save it.

But——there was no change to Takeru’s heart.

“No matter how many people you kill, I won’t kill you.”

He put his selfish ego in words, one a decent human wouldn’t have.

The reason Takeru was upset wasn’t because a bunch of humans lost their lives, but because Kiseki seemed to have taken lives of people unrelated to this.

The fact his little sister was murdering pained him more than the people dying.

That was what he meant by saying “pointless”.

A decent human being would have killed Kiseki for the sake of the unrelated people in the world.

Moreover, they would kill Kiseki to stop her from killing any more people.

But Takeru was different.

No matter how many people die in this world, he won’t kill his little sister.

No matter how much blood she’ll stain her hands with, he won’t kill her.

Knowing that he is the only one in this world who can kill her, he doesn’t do that.

His little sister was more important to him than humanity, and she was also more important than her own sins.

He made a clear division in priorities.

Takeru was the most troublesome older brother in the world.

Even Kiseki seemed to feel aversion to Takeru’s selfishness.

He wasn’t lying nor bluffing, even Kiseki could tell that much.

Holding the entire humanity as a hostage against this man was pointless.

It wasn’t the humanity that should be taken hostage but——

“This is how I am. For the first time I ran away from you, for the second I broke the promise out of my selfishness. Do you want to die together with me despite that? You want to die together with this kind of guy?”

Moreover, I’m saying that I won’t kill you even at expanse of the entire world.

In response to Takeru’s question Kiseki immediately nodded.

“Kiseki won’t change. Takeru-kun is all there is for her.”

She replied, in response to which Takeru laughed.

“Why laugh?”

“No, that’s it. I’m the only one you know. You’ve been in a cage all this time so you don’t know any people other than me. Possibly there’s lots of other guys, much better than me y’know?”

“……”

“Don’t you think it’s a waste? Don’t you think it’s pointless? I have not the slightest intention of committing a double suicide with you, isn’t it tiring to do pointless things?”

“How silly. I don’t care about such things.”

Her heart wasn’t moved in the least by Takeru’s words.

Takeru scratched his head and heaved a sigh seeing his little sister act stubborn.

Kiseki had no intention of understanding him.

From her point of view, humanity was just an insurance.

If she wanted to shake Takeru up for real, she had something else.

“You say you won’t kill me even if entire humanity dies… but talking costs nothing.”

“If possible, I’d like you to stop. ‘Cause it’s a waste.”

Realizing neither side intends to yield, Kiseki sighed.

“Takeru-kun. I think talking any more than this is pointless.”

“……”

“Kiseki got bored of talking. She needs to kill all people in the world, and kill others then. Usagi-san, Mari-san, Ikaruga-san… Ouka-san, Kiseki can kill them any time.”

Seeing Takeru’s expression sharpen, Kiseki grew Hyakki Yakou from beneath her feet.

It spread out like a pool of blood and continued to grow a wall behind her.

That wall swelled and Takeru could see something come out from inside.

“——!!”

He was astonished. White-skinned humans appeared from the red meat.

They were his comrades from the 35th platoon.

Everyone had their eyes closed and were unconscious.

Kiseki wrapped tentacles around Ouka and others' limbs, showing off their miserable appearance to Takeru.

"Dumb, right. Not even trying to run away from Kiseki… these people tried to go help Takeru-kun. I quickly saved them."

"……"

"Safekeeping them without eroding is quite hard. The little ones listen to Kiseki now, but since Kiseki wants to kill these people it might be difficult to hold them back."

Raising her eyebrows, Kiseki stroked her lips.

When she did, Hyakki Yakou carried Ouka right beside her.

Kiseki wrapped her both hands around Ouka's head, then slowly scratched her cheek with a white nail.

"……ngh……!"

She smiled happily seeing Takeru gnash his teeth.

"With this Takeru-kun understands what kind of person Kiseki is, right? You hate me, don't you? You want to kill me, don't you? But it's not over yet. After I kill all the people in the world I will torment these people for a long time, so look forward to it."

"……"

"And then, Kiseki wants you… to pour all that hate into her…"

Her wide-open eyes were full of madness and wild joy.

All Takeru could do was suppress his anger. This was the worst situation possible. The world aside, everything that was dear to Takeru was taken hostage.

This was more than enough to shake his heart.

"……! Lapis, prepare so that 《Ragnarøkkr Enchant》 can be used any time…!"

《"Understood."》

Pulling half of his body back, Takeru took a thrusting stance.

Being directed clear intent to kill at, Kiseki laughed happy from the bottom of her heart.

"Aha… you see, Kiseki always wanted Takeru-kun to do that. Stare at her with these eyes… stare at Kiseki alone. Kiseki noticed that to have her wish fulfilled, she needs Takeru-kun's hatred."

"…Let me tell you this beforehand."

"You understand, so it's fine right? I don't want to fight with Takeru-kun. No matter what Takeru-kun says, Kiseki loves Takeru-kun. Just be quiet and hate Kiseki… Kiseki is the only thing you have to look at."

It was a distorted and sad desire.

If the person she loves won't look at her alone, she'll make it so only she is in his sight.

If the person she loves won’t kill her, she’ll make it so that he’ll feel like killing her.

——Hatred.

That was the only method that allowed Kiseki to have all of it.

Once again Takeru gnashed his teeth as he understood that.

“…I get it. I understand what you want, Kiseki.

So you intend to become that kind of person. I’m glad I confirmed that. Thank you for telling me that.”

While Kiseki made an ecstatic expression, Takeru declared flat-out.

He thrust the result of balancing things inside himself at Kiseki.

Red demon eyes pierced through Kiseki from behind long bangs.

“If you kill even one of my comrades,

————————I’ll kill you.”

Takeru declared that he will execute what he continued to refuse until now.

He said the words he wouldn’t say even if the entire humanity was on the line.

Kiseki’s cheeks loosened comfortably.

She wanted to hear these words. She continued to wait for these words.

However.

Takeru continued.

“But, *no matter what happens I have no intention of dying together with you.*”

“……? Just now, what?”

“I said I’m not dying with you.”

“…….?”

Takeru resolved the thrust stance, swung the sword wildly and took a deep breath.

Then put everything he had into the roar he released towards Kiseki.

“——Of course I won’t dammit! Why would I do a double suicide together with someone I friggin’ hate!!”

He roared with voice loud enough to cause ringing in her ears, loud enough to seem like it resounded throughout the city.

His temple convulsed from anger, his eyebrows wrinkled and pupils contracted.

There was no sight of the gentle brother, only Kusanagi Takeru’s figure.

Only Kusanagi Takeru, directing his hatred at Kiseki.

“I’ll pass on dying happily together with someone who killed my comrades! Even if the world is destroyed, my comrades die and I’m left alone together with you——I’m definitely, DEEEEFINITELY not dyin’! I’m going to live even if I have to eat rocks and drink piss!”

“…….”

“I don’t deny revenge… if you kill my comrades it won’t matter whether you’re my little sister or not, I’ll cut you down without hesitation!!”

At the end, Takeru exhaled as if spitting out, took another big breath and tensing up, he looked down on little Kiseki from above.

Kiseki opened her eyes wide and did not respond.

“You know, being hated by people is… this is how it means to be hated by me…! If you still don’t understand, I’ll make it easy to understand for you!”

“……”

“What kind of idiot does what the person he hates the most wants him to do! There’s a limit being conceited, dammit!”

It was a very sound argument.

It was nothing complex. A conclusion anyone can reach with ease.

That was what being hated meant.

Kiseki didn’t know even something that simple.

It’s because Takeru was very simple that he could refuse Kiseki’s mistaken wish.

Love and hate are two sides of the same coin, it could be said they are separated by a thin line. That’s what he would like to say but that would be showing off too much.

Fuck this.

Fuck this, Takeru spat out.

He didn’t know well what is love, but it was impossible for it to be similar to hatred.

There was no way hatred would turn into salvation.

That much——he could guarantee.

“Choose. Be hated by me, be killed by me and die all alone… or live together with me…!”

You won’t get what you want by using hatred, no matter what. Takeru declare to Kiseki.

There was no choice but to do this.

The two ways turned into one.

If Kiseki makes the wrong choice, Takeru won’t hesitate. No matter how much he ends up hurt, he will take his little sister’s life if she kills his comrades.

No matter what anyone says, he had no intention of overturning this decision of his.

Originally, she was his precious little sister he had to protect. That hasn’t changed even now. She was his pitiful little sister carrying a cursed destiny.

It was fine if he was blamed for everything. He was prepared to carry this burden. If it’s for his little sister, he would give anything with exception of his own life.

However, even Takeru had a limit of what he could tolerate. He abandoned the idea of dying together, broke the promise with Kiseki, and gained precious comrades for whom he would stick to his life.

Even if it’s his beloved sister, if she deliberately takes the lives of his comrades——he’ll

be furious.

——And will snap.

——Then do anything he can to have revenge.

That was his ego, one he intended to carry through with.

“You’re still human…! *Don’t let your heart become demon’s, and be cut by me…* Kiseki!”

Making his last wish, Takeru turned the blade towards Kiseki.

Stunned, Kiseki stared at Takeru and staggered.

“…Kiseki is… is…”

She held her head as if she tried to stop her own sense of self from collapsing and continued to grumble something.

Sweat appeared on Takeru’s forehead as he held the sword.

Having a fight with Kiseki——to Takeru, this was practically a bet.

Although he had the power to kill her, he didn’t have the power to stop her.

To stop her, he could only use words.

Takeru engraved in his heart the words told him by Mari.

『“Kiseki-chan is the one who has to change.”』

He thought that she was right.

In order to change Kiseki he decided to have a fight with her.

Just like Takeru who changed from a demon to a human, Kiseki too should be able to as well.

Kiseki was still human. If she really didn’t have any hesitation, she would have destroyed humanity without coming in contact with Takeru and killed his comrades without showing them off to him.

She still remained part human.

Part of her yearning for her brother, a lingering affection was still remaining.

Takeru believed so.

There was no other way to stop Kiseki but to bet on that.

“Why…? Kiseki decide this is fine… she decided to do her best… and yet this…”

The released Hyakki Yakou wailed, as if responding to Kiseki’s hesitation.

“…strange… since when did Kiseki…”

Her appearance as she questioned herself, looked painful.

Kiseki swayed between madness and sanity.

No, surely there was no madness in her in the first place. In her own way, Kiseki just worked towards her own goal. It must have been inevitable, since Takeru broke his

promise.

The giant tree towering over the city swayed in response to Kiseki's confusion.

It was unknown whether they activated, or ceased to operate because of Takeru's words.

However——there was no mistake that this was a big chance.

Takeru squeezed the handle, a flame appeared in his pupils.

"——Lapis! 《Ragnarøkkr Enchant》!"

He shouted, instructing Lapis.

A magic circle emerged beneath his feet, both his field of view and the blade filled with twilight.

There were several things beyond expectations. Since his comrades were already captured by Kiseki, there was no choice but to use it here. 《Twilight Enchant》 was unable to absorb Hyakki Yakou and destroy it. Rather than to kill Kiseki, he had to use this power to bring back his comrades.

He would wipe out all the unnecessary things from around Kiseki by using 《Ragnarøkkr Enchant》 and temporarily strip her naked.

In order to confront her while she's human in body and mind.

Face each other as humans in order to convey his *real feelings* to Kiseki.

Takeru's hand holding the sword trembled for the first time now. A vision of himself ending up killing Kiseki in an emergency appeared in his head, terrifying him.

——Don't hesitate, do it!

Before I turn berserk out of desperation I'll bring back my comrades——and turn Kiseki back human!

Magic gathered in the blade and the power to kill gods was on verge of activating.

He will put everything he has into this one strike.

This is the battle he bets everything on!

"Mm〜 hallelujah hallelujah♪——you really are waay too selfish, makes me sick."

His focus directed on Kiseki was disturbed.

An attack was coming. An ambush. A surprise attack.

Takeru knew this way of speaking——it was *him.*

A gold and black shadow danced in the corner of Takeru's field of vision.

He swung the sword towards the attacker coming from the sky.

Blade clashed with a blade and Takeru's magic was interrupted.

“——AaaAAA!!”

“——HA!!”

In the middle of a swirling shockwave, Takeru exchanged gazes with the surprise attacker.

Of all possible times——this guy appears now.

As if he’d forget. This way of doings things, this swordplay, this disgusting flashy blonde hair.

Every time he’s the worst. Every time he appears suddenly.

The guy who descended from nowhere in the sky and swung his sword in a straight line downwards was——

“It’s been a while, Kusanagi Takeru!”

“Hauntedd…!!”

Takeru swung his sword in anger.

Haunted attacked from the front only at first, once Takeru slashed at him with all his anger he lightly avoided and stepped backwards.

Then, rotated his body twice and facing Takeru he spread his arms.

Exaggerated as usual, overblown as usual, bold as usual,

Haunted the Necromancer made a self-satisfied expression enjoying his own advent, completely unable to read the mood.

“I was close to being coooompleetely late for the end of the world but——I’m glad I made it! The side dish Kiseki-san, my enemy the main dish as well as my dolce Mari-san are luckily still alive!Wonderful!”

He swung the magic sword Dáinsleif, raised it up in front of his face and grinned.

Takeru wordlessly sheathed Mistilteinn.

Exhaled deeply and stopped himself from breathing in.

“Still, you. Yeah you, Kusanagi Takeru. Didn’t you lose your direction? Who on earth prioritizes comrades over the entire humanity?! Moreover you refuse to kill your little sister that murdered countless people, isn’t that outrageous?! As fellow morally bankrupt person I’m impressed!”

“Kusanagi Double-Edged style secret art——”

“However howee〜eever! You were supposed to whisper sweet nothings to Kiseki-san to persuade her! What’s up with you bringing her down to the depths of despair? You were supposed to have a tearful reunion with Kiseki-san in each other’s arms, and then I was to make my appearance, but it’s all ruined! Making others despair is *my*——”

“——Kusanagi Sword.”

Meanwhile Takeru had——as if to respond to the surprise attack from earlier, triggered the Demon Heart and released the Double-Edged style's secret technique.

Without hesitation he slashed with supersonic speed. He didn't skimp out on power. Although normally activating the Demon Heart was quite a lot of work, there was no need to concentrate his thinking on cutting down this guy.

Against him, Takeru felt nothing but the instinct to "cut him".

Blown him away as fast as possible. Don't give him any more time to talk.

He had to save Kiseki and his comrades.

There was no time to allow some irregulars to suddenly step in——!

In the world stopped by Demon Heart, Takeru attacked Haunted.

Haunted was in the middle of making his speech with a complacent expression, but right after Takeru announced the secret art's name he grimaced slightly and started taking an evasive action.

It could be said that he did well reacting, but there was no way for him to catch up.

The surprise attack using speed Takeru inherited from his master he was able to cut anyone and anything.

At the same time he unsheathed the sword, he slashed Haunted's torso.

Then continuing he turned around the blade and cut at enemy's brains from above.

Being cut in the head and starting to split apart, Haunted looked at Takeru.

However, Takeru didn't match his gaze and continued to attack.

Third slash, fourth slash, fifth slash, sixth slash, seventh slash——in order not to allow him recover, in order not to allow him to get in Takeru's way, he continued to cut him up in small pieces so that even cells are blown away.

Fifteen slashes in total.

After Takeru chopped Haunted up, he turned his back to him.

Immediately after Demon Heart's effect expired, Haunted's body exploded backwards.

Takeru looked for Kiseki while having his back covered with tremendous amount of blood and pieces of meat.

"Kiseki…!"

However, she was nowhere to be seen.

In the place Kiseki stood, there was a flat, bloody pool of wriggling Hyakki Yakou.

Without doubt she must have sank in underground and hid herself.

"……This is the worst…"

It was the worst thing that could happen.

Like this, he only rejected Kiseki and pushed her down to bottom of despair.

He was unable to bring back his comrades, he disturbed Kiseki’s mind and clearly became enemies with her.

Their quarrel wasn’t over yet. Since he’s unable to reach out to Kiseki, the world might end.

He needs to chase after her.

His little sister must be hurt now, he has to look for her…

“——Here I thought you would come at me fair and square, a surprise attack was unexpected. I ended up dying about five times, because of that.”

pat, a hand was placed on Takeru’s shoulder.

The culprit behind this situation stood behind Takeru, happily grinning.

He should have been blown into little pieces, but he stood behind Takeru as if nothing happened.

Most likely he predicted and planned that much.

That includes his timing for appearing and all.

He probably waited for the best moment while grinning.

Haunted moved his mouth beside Takeru’s ears and laughed hoarsely.

“What a shaaame. It didn’t go as you wanted it to.”

“……”

“That’s a nice expression. It’s not an exaggeration to say that I chased after you to see it. It was worth awakening Kiseki-san’s heart for this…”

…If I don’t chase her, there’ll be the worst outcome.

I have no time to spare for this guy.

As he thought so, Takeru’s heart was disturbed.

“Tricking her was really easy〜. Because, Kiseki-san was driven into a corner by you in the first place. By changing her perspective on a few things, I easily flipped around love and hatred.”

“…Shut up.”

“Her blossoming was beautiful… it felt really good.”

“Shut up…!”

I need to chase after her.

I need to chase after her. I need to chase after her.

Hurry, hurry up.

The feelings hurrying him, and the uncontrollable urge conflicted each other.

“Now then, now now, so?”

“……”

“What will you do? Go at it? ——Continue where we left off half a year ago?”

I need to chase after her!

I have to chase after her no matter what!

——But before that…!

“…DON’T GET IN MY
WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY

I’ll crush this shitty bastard!

I’ll continue to kill him until his existence is gone, so that he can never get in my way again!

Unable to withstand his anger, Takeru furiously turned around and slashed at Haunted.

But this time it didn’t work.

Haunted clad himself in power of an Einherjar and received Takeru’s anger with despair.

While exchanging sword strikes with Takeru and scattering sparks, Haunted laughed loudly.

“Hahahahahahahahahahahaha. Thaaaaaaat’s how it’s supposed to beeeee! I’ve been waiting for this moment!”

Anger and despair clashed.

They resumed the battle from a half a year ago when they first met.

However, the worst ending was approaching by the moment.

Takeru had to quickly erase this man from existence.

The Glossary

Pipe Fox (管狐) – A type of a fox used by kitsune-tsukai (fox users), supposedly described as a rat-sized fox that could be kept inside a pipe.

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Chapter 3 - Look Only Ahead of You

Kyouya, Sage and Yuzuho who remained in the city were running out of breath as the wave of demon incarnations pushed in.

They knew there is no end to enemy and with the exhaustion from yesterday's battle, they approached their limit quicker than expected.

The three stood back-to-back again and somehow were able to retain their postures.

They all thought the same thing.

How long do I have to continue this?

They were unable to move and unable to escape. Their pride wouldn't allow them to abandon people inside the shelter.

With just a will not to die, the three continued to fight.

"Damn it…what the hell…am I doing…!"

"Don't waste your breath…and concentrate instead…!"

While Yuzuho and Kyouya spat out curses, Sage, all covered in sweat squeezed out magic power from his body.

"We can only believe in Kusanagi now…!"

He suppressed the magic power consumption by assembling several operative procedures and maintained the barrier while maximizing efficiency, but he was at his limits.

Cracks ran through his barrier and it seemed likely to collapse.

Kyouya and Yuzuho forced their beat-up bodies to raise their weapons.

The turns between attacking and defending kept growing shorter. Two more repeats would be the limit.

But there was no choice but to bite the bullet and endure.

Until Kusanagi Takeru stops his little sister.

"____?!"

That's when Sage, who was concentrating on building the operative procedure had opened his eyes wide.

His line of sight was directed to the other side, behind the demon incarnations that had surpassed the barrier.

While Kyouya and Yuzuho wondered what's up with him, a flash of black light gushed out from behind the demons.

Momentarily, there was a great explosion behind the demons.

A blast wave struck the three, who braced themselves as not to be blown away.

“What is this?!!”

“I don’t know! Something’s coming…!”

While the two panicked in confusion, Kyouya squinted.

“…No way.”

Only he knew the shadow that walked their way in midst of flames.

Simple black armor.

Overwhelming power that causes huge blasts of air.

Fit to be called a guardian because of his features and iron will.

“…So he survived…that bastard…!”

At the same time Kyouya muttered that, all the pressing incarnations were blown without a trace.

Momentarily the scenery Kyouya had seen returned back to normal as if there was no demon invasion right from the start.

A figure walked their way from the center of the crossroads that were in front of the shelter.

Taking steps that let out an imposing sound, the figure looked at Kyouya.

“——Well done on your mission. Tell me where is Kusanagi Takeru.”

Indifferently, like a machine, the man armed with two guns one in each hand——had returned from hell.

＊ ＊ ＊

“OOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAA!!”

Leaving himself to anger, Takeru swung the sword at Haunted.

Exerting himself, Takeru ordered his muscles to cut the enemy. He didn’t take the recoil into consideration, only slashed single-mindedly.

He no longer cared about the damage he received so far, or the exhaustion.

Takeru became another being——one who existed only to kill this fucker.

“I’ll kill you! I’ll slaughter you! DIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!”

Haunted received raging Takeru’s attacks while laughing.

He wasn’t especially skillful when parrying attacks, he just furiously parried Takeru’s

furious attacks.

“This is shit! Your sword strikes are shit! This isn’t even swordsmanship as you leave everything to anger, this is shit, nothing else! However——from time to time, this kind of thing isn’t too bad.”

“Because of you I…! How much frustration do you think I tasted, huh?! How much suffering have you made Kiseki to shoulder?!”

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! Aren’t you the one who came here carrying that burden?!”

Haunted repelled Takeru’s sword, the two took distance from one another.

Takeru retracted his leg while scraping the ground, and ignoring the recoil kicked off the ground.

Every of his moves lacked sophistication, but he put in all anger and power he had as he tried to overpower the enemy.

“I don’t need you to tell me that!”

He forgot what he learned during the fight with Orochi, and being at mercy of his own soul he widely cleaved Haunted.

It was impossible for that attack would go through.

There was no way such attacks would work on Haunted, who parried everything as if it was nothing.

However,

“You being aware of it makes it even worse!”

Haunted also fought back against Takeru’s anger with pure force.

While having a lot of fun.

Happy and delighted, he clashed with Takeru.

“I think your awareness is just an excuse! To Kiseki-san, you’re just forcing things on her!”

As their swords clashed, Haunted denied Takeru.

Despite the fact things he had questioned himself over, Takeru pushed Haunted’s sword away as he revealed his feelings.

“That’s why I fought to save her, I fought selfishly all this time to show her happiness! In order to relay everything to her I… in order to let her understand me… I involved everyone in this… and because of you, I——”

Haunted snorted at Takeru, and pushed with his sword even stronger.

“——I, I, I, me, I, Iiii”! That’s your true nature! In the end, your self-sacrifice is for your own sake! The fact you changed your mind on killing Kiseki-san is the proof of that!”

“……!!”

“But I can affirm this——you won’t kill her! Even if she kills your comrades, there’s no

way you will hurt your little sister! That's the kind of guy you are! No matter what you spout, you won't act on your words and cast away the sword at the last moment! Just stay half-assed and lose everything!"

Dáinsleif was pressed against Takeru and bit into his shoulder.

The black blade tinged with red light sliced through the armor as easily as if it was cloth and tore his left shoulder.

Takeru released a growl deep from inside his chest as blood gushed from his shoulder.

"You're wrong! Right from the start I——I had no intention of losing either my comrades or Kiseki!!"

He clenched his left hand and hit the back of Mistilteinn's blade with his fist.

Kusanagi Double-Edged style's Monk with Iron Mallet. By striking the back of the blade with their fist, the user could repel the enemy's blade.

Blown away by the impact, Haunted leaped backwards and swung the sword randomly in the air at nothing in particular.

Takeru and Lapis have confirmed what was Dáinsleif's intrinsic performance in their previous battle.

Those movements left slashes behind them. Even without being asked to, Lapis applied an analysis filter on Takeru's retina allowing him to see magic power.

There were countless slashes left behind, all facing in Takeru's direction.

At the same time Haunted landed, he protruded his left hand forward and moved it to make a cross in the air, that's when a magic circle appeared beneath his feet.

"Yeah, indeed! That is why you are my enemy! I'll beat you here, kill that pitiful girl, then once you fall into despair I will kill you, finally to indulge myself and have my way with your comrades as they choke to tears with grief…! If you say you will save everyone, then I will drive all the people you want to save to the depths of despair!"

The magic circle rotated, Haunted clenched his left hand forming a fist, his hair rose up as an after effect of magic power manifesting.

"——And the world will continue as it always had! My colorful garden of despair will continue to bloom forever!"

Haunted laughed like a madman.

I won't let you.

Takeru jumped eighty meters high in order to avoid the slashes remaining in mid-air and sheathed his sword.

"Ha-haaa! I got you, Kusanagi!"

And the moment he dived downwards while using boosters with magic power, Haunted swung his sword.

That moment, the multitude of slashes remaining in the air, all flew towards Takeru.

It was the first time Takeru saw this move. Apparently it was possible to move the residual slashes and have them fly to turn into attacks from a distance.

Still——so what even if they could?

“——Let’s blow through them!”

In response to Takeru’s yell, Lapis fine-tuned the FM Booster as he swept down and dodged the flying slashes.

Since there were too many to avoid them all, he received a multitude of them as he continued to accelerate in his fall.

Dragging a bloody veil behind himself, Takeru rotated his body forward when he was at nearly twenty meters from the ground.

At the same time he pressed his thumb on the sheath and the blade’s flange to create a repulsive force.

Moreover, he activated Demon’s Heart.

“Kusanagi Double Edged style——”

With a narrow margin of time, Haunted completed his magic and was triggering it.

“《Belladonna——”

He spoke the magic’s name.

Once the despair magic power was condensed to the limit, the magic circle shattered and the magic was released.

Takeru also finished gathering the repulsive force on the collar to the very limit and unsheathed the sword matching the timing of his rotation.

“——Mantis Slope Type-Two!”

“——Forest》!”

What Takeru had released was a technique that combined Mantis Slope and Heavenly Evil Spirit techniques and was performed in Demon’s Heart state. Using his body weight, free fall’s speed and the rotation he made the fastest slash. Determining that it would be possible in Demon’s Hearts state, Takeru improvised the technique.

——On the other hand, 《Belladonna Forest》 was a large-scale summoning magic.

Because there was time until Takeru’s attack reaches him, Haunted’s magic clashed with Takeru’s sword first.

《Belladonna Forest》 was literally a forest of variant——a muddy stream of theirs.

This magic was very simple. It came in contact with the mythological world only “Despair” property holding sorcerers could come in contact with, and summoned magical organisms at random.

Black rose variants, huge variant reminiscent of a whale, amoeba-like variants emitting irregular cries and waves, flocks of huge one-eyed bats, a giant with an octopus head.

All of it created a big obstacle of five meters in diameter and discharged everything they

had.

Takeru's full-body attack burst the muddy stream of variants, but even for supersonic attack of Double-Edged style this was an impossible amount of enemies to push back.

The muddy stream assaulted Takeru without stopping.

His strike pushed against the stream, but before long magic started to push him away.

《"——It's impossible to defeat us with magic."》

However, in the end, it were products of magic.

《Twilight Enchantment》

——In front of Lapis' intrinsic magic, it all had an opposite effect.

The blade shining with azure brilliance continued to absorb everything that was emitted.

As magical organisms, even their bodies in this world were composed of magic.

Therefore, they were powerless against Lapis' magic.

Takeru absorbed all the released magic at once and slipped out of muddy stream and assaulted Haunted from above.

《"——We already know that."》

Along with Dáinsleif's personality, Nacht's whisper, Haunted leaped and was in front of Takeru.

A red-tinged magic power dwelled in his blade.

《Berserk Enchantment》 ——it was an enchantment that granted extreme physical abilities to the user in exchange for driving them insane. Moving at speed comparable to Takeru's Demon's Heart which had left behind the speed of sound, Haunted, his eyes glowing red, had thrust at Takeru from the side.

Takeru's speed and power had decreased as Mantis Slope Type-Two had clashed with 《Belladonna Forest》 and 《Twilight Enchantment》 couldn't be used continously. If he was to use the secret art in Witch-Hunter form, his body would explode with recoil the moment he used it.

His quick draw slash and Haunted's high-speed thrust clashed.

Their blades rubbed against each other, the two's line of sight met as the sparks scattered.

And when all that remained was the clash——

《"Host!"》

The moment Lapis called him, Takeru released Demon's Heart.

His thinking had returned. His speed had returned.

The moment he heard Lapis' voice, Takeru regained his calm and twisted his body all at once.

"——?!"

Haunted was astonished.

Kusanagi Double-Edged style's Ghost Light Firefly. The technique allowed parrying by using enemy's power, then use the rebound generated by that as user's own strength.

《"Flexible material——release."》

The thrust Haunted released rubbed against Mistilteinn's blade and avoided Takeru's body, Takeru used the power he gained from the parry and struck Haunted in the abdomen with his sword.

It was an extremely simple counter. The faster the opponent was, the greater was the damage dealt to them. By further releasing the absorbed magic, this technique exerted great power.

——*zwshhan*!

Haunted's torso was sliced off, his upper body blown far away.

After feeling certain response from Haunted's body, Takeru vigorously landed on the ground.

"?!!"

However, ahead of where Takeru landed——Haunted's magic circle still remained.

A trap. Haunted anticipated this and placed it ahead of time.

The magic circle shattered and an magical organism resembling a twisted porcupine appeared from within. It raised a loud voice and covered itself with jet-black needles.

"Ghh——!"

Unable to avoid as he landed, Takeru had his body pierced by the needles. Although he was able to avoid having vitals pierced, needles pierced his right shoulder, left leg and thighs.

He thrust at the porcupine magical organism that tried chasing after him and killed it, and landed clumsily.

Supporting himself with the sword, he exhaled vigorously.

"Haa… haa…"

There was a response.

He killed Haunted for certain.

——But Takeru knew that such confidence had no meaning when it came to fighting that man.

A sound of footsteps sounded from about ten meters behind him.

Without changing his battle-readiness, Takeru turned around and raised the sword.

He was no longer surprised.

The despair stood there as if nothing had happened.

"Nfuh, you've improved. You must have been really frustrated by the fact you lost to me."

“……”

“I admit, I can’t win against you with just swordsmanship. Ah, how frustrating… this is so frustrating! But it’s fun! That’s how it has to be, o’ descendant of demon hunters!”

Spreading both arms, Haunted exaggeratedly displayed his joy like a theater’s actor, causing Takeru great discomfort.

His soul that retrieved composure, had once again started turning into that of a demon’s.

Dyed with anger.

There was no time for him to think what to do to kill Haunted. There was no choice but to continue killing him.

I need to hurry… I need to hurry and kill this shithead dead… that’s all the thinking I need now!

As he grit his teeth, the soul of a demon reflected in Takeru’s eyes as he raised his sword.

But, that’s when.

“……?”

In the direction of the demon-swallowed city, there was some object releasing dazzling light.

Takeru grimaced and followed the object with his eyes.

The object rose up to the sky and headed straight towards them.

Its orbit was like that of a mortar shelling.

“Now, let us continue! No more stinginess from me!”

Haunted didn’t notice it. He created a magic circle and raising the tip of his sword, shuddered in elation.

The object tinged with light swooped down.

It headed at the two——no, it headed straight at Haunted from above.

“Now now now, how about I show the true despair to——

——pyu”

The object hit Haunted when he was on the verge of finishing a complacent declaration.

At the same time he screamed a mysterious “pyu”, Haunted’s head was crushed by something like a black fist.

The impact created a huge crater on the hill.

Even Takeru forgot his anger in shock.

His vision was covered with a cloud of dust and he had no clue what had happened.

“W-what on earth——?!”

The moment he let out a dumbfounded yell——a black fist appeared in front of his head.

The black fist smashed Takeru's cheek in and just like that, punched him in the face.

Takeru's body bounced on the ground as he was blown away starting from the head.

When the momentum of the punch subsided, he stood up while holding down his cheek.

There, stood the,

"What are you doing Kusanagi! Hurry up and fulfill your goal!"

Clad in black armor——glaring at Takeru was the strongest man.

Takeru called his name while Lapis healed his swollen cheek.

"Kurogane-san… you're alive——"

"Look for your little sister, fool!"

The appearance of angry Kurogane Hayato looked more terrifying to Takeru than anything in this world.

Blown away to be put in order, Takeru closed his mouth and fell silent. When he calmed his anger, his composure returned and his head turned blank.

Hayato turned his back to Takeru and walked towards Haunted, who still had his head crushed.

"Don't let yourself be disturbed by fighting some moron. Throw away your anger. You don't need it, at least for now."

"……"

"Look only ahead. Move on like you have done until now."

"……"

"I will take your anger on myself."

Hayato performed a gunspin and pulled out the silver Relic Eater from its holster.

Silver was mixed in the black armor and the hybrid Witch Hunter form was quickly completed.

There was no hesitation in his posture, not a shred of weakness.

His back was big and reliable.

"Go. Prove me that your selfishness was right…!"

Clad in black and silver magic power Kurogane Hayato burdened his big back with Takeru's anger.

Takeru did not know just how many things he had burdened himself so far.

What he knew, was that inside Hayato dwelled tremendous ambitionless conviction.

He squeezed his fist and nodded lightly.

"……Thank you…!!"

Takeru leaped and at the same time ejected magic power, disengaging from combat.

He burned Hayato's appearance in his pupils over the shoulder.

It was the first time he had seen someone look this reliable.

It woke him up.

Just as he was told to, he headed to do what had to be done.

Takeru faced forward as he reproached himself.

"——Lapis! Search for Kiseki's location!"

He instructed his partner and ran over the sky in order to accomplish his own objective.

＊ ＊ ＊

After listening to the sound of Takeru leaving, Kurogane Hayato quietly closed his eyes.

You do that, he said in his heart to Takeru.

He didn't think that colliding his law against Takeru and trying to change him was a mistake.

Just like Mineshiro Kazuma did for Hayato, his current self was the result of their collision back then.

But Kusanagi Takeru did not concede. He wasn't right or wrong, the boy just decided to continue moving down the road he believed in.

Just like Mineshiro Kazuma and Kurogane Hayato did in the past.

That's why there was nothing Hayato could tell Takeru at this point.

He too, moved on the path he had chosen.

"…Really, you. No clue about how to read the mood, right…"

Squashed Haunted muttered while sighing on the bottom of the huge crater that had appeared when Hayato interfered, then got up.

Hayato opened his closed eyelids.

Haunted pat his tattered priest clothing and arranged his disheveled hair while still in the bottom of the crater.

Meanwhile, Hayato coldly looked down at Haunted from the edge of the crater.

Haunted looked up at Hayato, seeming displeased from the bottom of his heart.

"You always, ALWAYS appear abruptly and get in the way of my dinner time, don't you. Last time I was able to proceed with my things because I prepared a precaution, but this will be the third time now."

He glared at Hayato intently.

Hayato maintained the usual strong expression, but he had smiled faintly as he replenished the bullets in Caligula's cylinder.

"Sorry. Actually, getting in your way is my hobby."

This might have been the first time in Hayato's life that he joked.

Haunted snorted.

"Fighting against you is uninteresting, so I'd rather not."

"Don't be like that, play along with my hobby a little."

"No matter how much I provoke you, no matter how many comrades of yours I kill… you are completely unfazed. Because of your law or whatever, you aren't shaken by feelings enough. It's always boring to fight you. I haaaate people who are just strong and nothing else…"

"Right back at you. The fact that you don't die no matter how many times I kill you is boredom incarnate. However――"

After finishing replenishment of ammo, Hayato inserted the cylinder back in the gun.

"――It seems you have died plenty of times already. No matter how much you increase the number of lives, they aren't infinite."

Haunted blinked with surprise.

"Oh my, I'm surprised you noticed the source of my immortality."

"You are the only criminal that I challenged with intention of killing and yet lives. There will be no third time."

"Oh-hooh."

"Your stock of lives *increases by the amount of lives* you take with magic. There is few data of "Despair" property magic, but seeing as you avoided Nikaido Mari's "Aurora" that deals damage to the soul itself, I was convinced that it's possible to kill you."

Hayato said that while spinning Maximilien on the finger of his left hand.

"Mhm. Perfect answer. This amazing EXE captain disgusts me to the point of barfing. Still, it might be possible to kill me with Mari-san's Aurora magic, but how exactly are *you* going to kill me? Got a plan?"

"Of course. By the way, Haunted――"

The black and silver steel gave out dull shine.

"――How much lives do you have left in your stock?"

That's what Hayato answered with to Haunted's question.

Haunted covered his face with one hand and stiffed his laughter.

"I see. Dumbass method of brute force, huh. As expected of the great hero who only has being strong going for him. I'm impressed."

He bent his waist, kneaded the magic power sticking to him and expanded a magic circle

beneath his feet.

The distorted power wriggling over his armor was kneaded, completing the Hero form. The magic power still overflowed and wriggled around Haunted and appeared in the form of countless people's faces, reminiscent of evil spirits.

Haunted glared with anger from between the fingers.

"Hey, Kurogane——I'm a *necromancer aren't I?"*

That was Haunted's answer to Hayato's question.

The two erased their expressions and only glared at each other angrily.

Their power burst out at the very same time.

＊ ＊ ＊

Kusanagi Kiseki wandered, lost in a forest of red meat.

There was no remnant of the former city, there wasn't a single human figure anywhere.

The demons here and there whispered and screamed, but to Kiseki who was the main body of Hyakki Yakou, this was no different from silence.

"……"

She couldn't get Takeru's words out of her head.

By being hated, she could monopolize her brother's feelings. If she steals everything from him, he will look only at her. That conclusion wasn't wrong.

It was because there was no other way.

That was the only thing allowing her to maintain the existence called Kusanagi Kiseki. Even if she does something destructive, as long as she doesn't succumb to insanity she could control Hyakki Yakou. And above all, she did indeed wish for destruction.

She didn't think in the least that she was wrong. If she is to die for the sake of the world, she'd rather sacrifice the world for her own sake. But she did not know why did she feel so much pain in her chest.

It was the same after she was shown a dream in the Alchemist, escaped and reunited with her brother. Even when she confronted him full of hatred and jealousy, she felt the same emotion.

——Onii-chan is angry.

Even when she saw Takeru enraged earlier… the emptiness from then remained in her chest.

"……Why…."

She shouldn't have any hesitation, so she wondered why was she wandering around in a

place like this.

『“There is no way that your wish will be accepted by Kusanagi, no matter what.”』

『“Try to understand how Takeru feels.”』

『“You actually don’t want to be hated by your dear, beloved Takeru-kun, do you?”』

Recalling what those three said, Kiseki fell on her knees and held her head.

“…Shut up…”

Her trembling and hoarse voice was drowned in Hyakki Yakou’s voice.

It advocated Kiseki’s screams.

『“I feel sad”』 『“I hate this”』 『“Why”』 『“Don’t hate me”』 『“Don’t hate me”』 『“Look at Kiseki”』 『“Kill Kiseki”』 『“Love me”』 『“Hold me”』

『“Be by my side”』

Even when she blocked her ears she heard her true feelings she didn’t want to know of.

Kiseki understood that those were her real feelings.

She didn’t want to understand that, but she did.

She moved her hands away from her head and had them fall to the ground.

“I already thought this hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands times… haven’t I…”

Kiseki said that to Hyakki Yakou that sorrowfully shed tears.

Every day when she was killed, she continued to think about Takeru.

She made an effort to be a beloved little sister to Takeru. She did her best to make Takeru love her as her brother. Every time he had come, she persuaded herself that she was “Takeru-kun’s” little sister.

Even if it wasn’t as “Takeru-kun”, she was happy that he came to see her as her brother.

Kiseki felt that the fact he held her dear, was precious to her.

She thought it was fine to continue like that forever. No matter how much she suffered and was in pain, she was fulfilled as long as her brother came to see her. Just by having him come, Kiseki could remain a cute little sister.

But… she noticed at some point.

That her brother also looked at people other than her.

Whenever she heard about what he did outside, Kiseki’s heart turned blacker and cloudier. She felt in pain when she could only hear the stories from him, as if he was moving away from her.

Kiseki knew that the reason he turned like that was she herself. “Onii-chan doesn’t understand feelings of other people”… in the end, those words caused Takeru to drift away from her.

——Why?

She always cried this out in her heart.

——Why was it that Kiseki can only look at Onii-chan, but Onii-chan won't look only at Kiseki?

Her tears have soon changed into anger.

The anger she felt because of his betrayal, turned into hatred.

Kiseki hated people around him, hated the world——and has come to hate him.

She started seeking "Takeru-kun". It wasn't her brother that was her salvation, it was the "Takeru-kun" who would look only at her.

Kiseki hated her brother and sought "Takeru-kun" who would look only at her, she tried to take back "Takeru-kun" from her brother by having him direct his hatred at her.

Even if what he directed at her wasn't love, she thought it would save her.

『"What kind of idiot does what the person he hates the most wants him to do!"』

Those words pierced Kiseki's heart.

Although she knew hatred, Kiseki didn't understand how does it feel to be hated. Being hated by her brother meant that instead of monopolizing him, she would die all alone. It meant losing the only person who would accept her in this world, a world that didn't accept her.

Takeru's face in Kiseki's head faded away.

Even though they didn't spend much time together, he showed her many smiles.

Not even once he got angry like that.

Her chest once again throbbed.

The demon tree scattered tears that poured down on the city like rain of blood.

"This is what I wanted… Kiseki wanted this, so why cry…?"

Kiseki herself knew the best that Hyakki Yakou was something like a mirror reflecting her true, honest feelings. It always only granted Kiseki's own wishes. Hyakki Yakou and Kiseki weren't separate existences, it didn't have its own soul nor own personality.

Hyakki Yakou was Kiseki's limbs and her heart itself.

Therefore, no matter how much she asked it questions, no answer had come.

No matter how much she denied it, Hyakki Yakou's tears were her own tears.

Soaking in the tears of blood, Kiseki embraced herself.

Even if she destroys the world and kill 35th platoon's comrades, Takeru won't die together with her. His eyes were serious. If she tries to kill his comrades, he will kill her.

If it was her from the past, she might have been satisfied by that.

She might have been happy to be killed at hands of her brother.

"It's Onii-chan's fault… it's all because of Onii-chan…"

When Kiseki dies, I will die as well

Dying together… that's what Takeru promised.

Ever since then, dying together with Takeru had become Kiseki's greatest wish.

A dream that wouldn't come true any more.

"What should Kiseki do?"

She tried asking the sky, but no answer had come.

She lost her goal, lost the path to salvation.

Didn't know what should she choose.

……

……

——Accept Takeru's wish and live the rest of her life as his little sister?

"That's the only thing I won't ever do…!"

Her face distorted in anguish, tears spilled in her eyes as she looked at the sky, but Kiseki clenched her fist.

Takeru's wish was nothing but a pipe dream.

They could no longer return to being siblings and she had no intention of returning to that dark place again. Even if she had acquired a human body just like Takeru said, what would that change? Did he really think that would make her happy?

Kiseki took lives of many people out of her own will. She didn't regret nor felt guilty of it.

Would the world forgive Kiseki? Would it allow her to live carefreely?

Friends, families, lovers, people whose precious people died at Kiseki's hands wouldn't forgive her.

The law and the world would judge her. Either take her life or make her suffer.

In the end, Kiseki would end up being able to listen to her brother's stories from a cage.

And Takeru——would without a doubt live happily on his own.

In Kiseki's imagination, a woman with sunset-colored hair snuggled up to Takeru.

"If I'm to accept Onii-chan's wish… I might as well…!"

There was no going back anyway.

"…I might as well…everything…!"

Gritting her teeth Kiseki faintly opened her tightly closed eyes.

The huge demon tree screamed and Hyakki Yakou filling the city started to destroy again.

If she can't get it, if she is to be alone, if she can't have "Takeru-kun" all for herself she might as well——

Kiseki's wide open eyes lit up with red.

“If Kiseki is to be rejected——!”

The earth trembled and the huge demon tree grew even more enormous.

The underground activity of Hyakki Yakou swallowing the world had gradually intensified.

“——Destroy everything and anything…!”

Kiseki’s sadness was relayed to Hyakki Yakou and the giant demon tree started covering the world.

I don’t need anything any more. If I can’t have anything, I will just kill everyone. If I become all alone in the world then this sadness will definitely disappear.

Kiseki wished for the demons to destroy.

The demons only fulfilled that wish.

“Let’s start with that person…!”

She already decided who to kill first.

The Glossary

Belladonna Forest (ベラドンナ・フオレスト) - It’s also written as (絶望の樹海) meaning “Abundant Forest of Despair”.

Chapter 4 - Reach Her, My Feelings

＊ ＊ ＊

——Ootori Ouka stood in the wasteland.

A single woman lied down on the dry and cracked earth not even a single plant grew on.

Ouka aimed the gun at the woman and exhaled roughly.

“Haa… haa… with this… my revenge is finally over…!”

The woman lying on the ground was Ouka’s hateful enemy.

She took away Ouka’s control over her body, and had her kill her own parents and even her beloved little sister.

Ouka entered the Antimagic Academy, has become an inquisitor, rose up to the rank of an inquisitor, and after several years she finally found her enemy.

Many years have passed since that tragedy.

She dedicated all of her adolescence to Inquisition, made no friends nor a lover and ignoring her surroundings she lived all alone.

It could be said that Ouka didn’t live a human life.

There was nothing she found fun.

She pulled the bolt and inserted a bullet into the chamber.

“I’ll apologize to my family once I’m in the afterlife…!”

It was finally the time for Ouka to be rewarded.

Once she pulls the trigger, she will definitely feel better.

Her lips twisted into a smile trembled as she put a finger on the trigger.

“Once I kill you I’ll finally be——……ah……!”

Ouka’s lips stiffened and she stopped speaking mid-sentence.

The words in the back of her throat wouldn’t come out.

She furrowed her eyebrows, puzzled.

I’ll be done with my revenge… and what then?

The gaze fixed on the woman had moved to the handgun’s muzzle.

The woman’s face ahead of the muzzle had grown hazy.

…what happens to me once I kill this woman?

Ouka noticed that with her family killed, once she completes her revenge she will have nothing left.

While Ouka searched her memories of the past, the woman ahead of the muzzle's point laughed.

——Kill me. I killed your family. You'll feel better once you kill me.

She spoke the words as if to hurry Ouka up.

But even despite the mockery, Ouka's finger didn't move.

If I kill this woman here and now, I'll have… nothing left. Revenge was my only goal in life, I'll have nothing left once it's done.

Looking confounded, Ouka looked around seeking help.

There, was nothing but a wasteland.

The other side of the horizon was blurred with heat haze, as if reflecting her own life waiting ahead.

There was no one. There was nothing. She couldn't see anything hinting her how should she live from now on.

——Now, take your revenge. You've lived for this moment, haven't you?

The woman spread her arms and waited for Ouka's judgment.

But Ouka's will had faltered.

Is it really correct to take my revenge like this?

Would killing a woman who desires death fulfill her revenge?

And above all,

…I know this emptiness.

Ouka had a feeling that she knew the emptiness of revenge.

Although she shouldn't have fulfilled it, she seemed to already know the uncontrollable emptiness that comes afterwards.

A few drops fell on the dry earth.

When she touched her cheeks, she realized they were her tears.

Ouka realized why was she crying.

The apologetic feelings towards her family for not squeezing the trigger in front of their killer, and the loneliness of being alone have brought Ouka to tears.

Living only for revenge was unforgivable.

Revenge wasn't only killing.

Once her revenge is over, she needs someone to be by her side.

『”——Let me walk by your side.”』

Ouka felt like she was told so by someone.

She was unable to recall the face of the person in question and shed tears from sadness from forgetting the memory of the person she should have been together with.

It was something very precious to her. Although it might have been just her delusion, she should have held it preciously.

Ouka looked up to the sky, squinted, and wiped her tears.

“……This isn’t good.”

Bearing her anger, Ouka put away the gun in the holster and took out handcuffs from her backpack.

While the woman continued to request that Ouka kills her as she was being handcuffed, Ouka just glared at her.

“This is my revenge against you… live, and continue regretting your sins…”

She replied to the woman.

——Are you going to live all alone while bearing your half-hearted decision? You’ll feel better once you kill me, you know?

Ouka replied without hesitation.

“I don’t mind. This must be my punishment for devoting everything I had to revenge.”

Let’s live. Let’s continue to live while carrying this half-hearted emotion.

Even if it’s hard, painful, lonely, I’ll continue to bear it and live on.

Because surely, my family would have wished for that——

That someone who said they will walk together, would have wished for that——

When Ouka closed her eyes the surroundings were wrapped in darkness.

The woman who should have been in front of Ouka has disappeared, although she should have been standing in the wasteland, now she was in the middle of empty darkness.

Her memory returned immediately. She realized that herself standing in the wasteland was a fabrication, and recalled her feelings for her irreplaceable comrades.

Ouka wiped off the tears with her hand.

And gently squeezed her fingers wet with ears into a fist.

“…I’m not glad that was just a dream. Emptiness still remains inside me despite that.”

She muttered as she felt a gaze from behind her back.

“But if I didn’t meet my comrades, I would have to continue living burdened with “loneliness”.”

Ouka turned around and looked at the master of this dream, who stood behind her.

Seeing Kiseki face downwards without budging even an inch, Ouka smiled.

“You have my thanks. For reminding me of my own foolishness… and not killing me, letting me live.”

She walked up to Kiseki and stood in front of her.

“I won’t say I understand how you feel. But I can understand a little of your feelings for Kusanagi. I too… am a woman.”

Ouka paused there and put her hand on her chest.

Kiseki didn’t say anything in response, but Ouka continued.

“But the world doesn’t consist of just Kusanagi. There’s plenty of people in it and plenty of ways to live. You probably don’t know that.”

“……”

“Back when I was only interested in revenge, I knew nothing just like you. The ones who taught me everything were Kusanagi, and my comrades from the 35th platoon.”

“……”

“Please… don’t give up on this world. It isn’t too late for you to learn about it together with Kusanagi. I too, want to know more about y——”

While Ouka attempted at persuasion, Kiseki unexpectedly took a step forward.

Kiseki raised her head and moved her face closer to Ouka, as if to press against her chin.

“Then tell me… tell me what should I do…”

Her face hidden behind her bangs wasn’t visible.

“Don’t give up on the world? That’s not it. It wasn’t Kiseki who gave up on the world, it’s the world that gave up on Kiseki.”

“Kiseki…”

“You have it nice, Ouka-san. You can walk by Onii-chan’s side. Mari-san, Usagi-san, Ikaruga-san too are allowed to be by his side. But do you think the world will forgive Kiseki for being by Onii-chan’s side? When Kiseki has this body?”

“…We will make it so that you can be by his side, surely. We’ll make your body the same as other humans…”

“You say I can become the same? How many people do you think Kiseki has killed? Even if she does as Onii-chan wants, Kiseki will be caged anyway. Nothing will change from now.”

“That won’t happen…! It’s your body that’s at fault, your heart is that of a human——”

“——So you know nothing! Kiseki *wanted* all of this!”

Ouka leaned backwards a little and looked towards furious Kiseki.

Reddened eyes peeked out from behind her bangs.

Kiseki stretched her thin arms and grasped Ouka’s neck, then strangled with abandon.

“Ghhr——!”

At the same time Ouka became unable to breathe and Kiseki's fingers bit into her throat, the world around them changed again.

A different scenery——it was not. She returned back to the real world.

When Ouka opened her eyes, she was wrapped around by red meat.

In front, there was Kiseki's main body strangling her.

This isn't a dream——it's reality.

Buried inside Hyakki Yakou, Ouka couldn't move.

She tried to release herself from Kiseki grip by using her barely-moving right hand, but Kiseki was overwhelmingly stronger.

"Kiseki told everyone right at the start, but no one understood. Kiseki's body grants Kiseki's wishes… this is no lie, both Onii-chan and Ouka-san are both so dumb. Everything would have settled nicely if you just killed Kiseki before this happened."

There was no light in Kiseki's eyes.

It seemed like she gave up on everything, there was only frustration remaining in her.

"It's too late now… Kiseki is no longer satisfied with just being killed. I can't bear the fact that once I die, Onii-chan will be happy together with Ouka-san. That's why I tried to destroy the world so that Onii-chan dies with me…"

"…khh…"

"But Onii-chan is stubborn, so that didn't work too. I really hate Onii-chan, actually. "Takeru-kun" also hates me now and I killed lots and lots of people so there's no going back. It's over for Kiseki doing her best as well."

Hands bit into Ouka's neck even more strongly.

"You are the only one Kiseki will kill… you, the one who stole Onii-chan from Kiseki, will not become part of Kiseki… you will die by those hands."

"……ghhn."

"Otherwise, Kiseki won't be able to stand it…!!"

There is no other way, Kiseki added as her mouth distorted and she put more force into her hands.

But as a proof of the fact she wasn't sure of her choice, a string of tears flowed from her eyes.

Ouka struggled to free herself from Kiseki's hands, but she was unable to do anything with just her own flesh and blood.

With her consciousness fading, she watched Kiseki.

Kiseki's dripping tears seemed like they were the despair overflowing from inside her.

No one knew just how much tears had she shed so far.

Just how much pain was she living in.

She continued to live while retaining her sanity until the moment she had broke out of the deepest prison to meet her brother.

The fact she hadn't gone mad is enough to describe how strong her heart was

"……"

But Kiseki who was in front of Ouka, looked like a normal girl.

A weak girl with delicate heart you could find anywhere.

A foolish little child who had her heart broken by the overly brutal situation she was in.

…I…can understand how she feels.

Ouka couldn't help but to look back at her own life.

When her family was killed she didn't know how to live. She took the path that might have been wrong… found a way of living called revenge, and nourished herself with it.

Just like current Kiseki, there was *no other way for her to be saved.*

I can't…blame…this girl.

Right now, she's very similar to how I was when I completed my revenge. Ouka thought.

The fact one of us achieved their goal and the other didn't makes no difference.

The despair from having nothing left once everything's over is the same, she thought.

What differed between them, was whether they had someone by their side.

Right now in front of Ouka, there was herself who didn't have comrades.

Ouka recalled again.

Her own father and mother who gave their life to protect her.

Her own hand stained with her little sister's blood.

The memories of her frozen heart being gradually warmed up by her comrades.

Revenge against her family's killer, Laugh Maker.

And finally, Takeru's warmth wrapping around her emptiness.

"…Kiseki…"

Ouka stopped resisting and put her hands on top of Kiseki's hands strangling her.

"You'll kill me…is that enough…? Will you be satisfied with that?"

"……"

"Then…would you…forgive everyone with my death…?"

Seeing tears trickle down from Ouka's eyes, Kiseki weakened the grasp on her neck by just a little bit.

"I understand that won't be enough for you…but please, Kiseki…I don't want…"

"……"

“I don’t want…to lose anything else that’s important to me…ghh, not ever again…I want to feel that way…”

Her shame, pride, beliefs.

Ouka discarded them all and cried.

She cried as if to plead Kiseki to spare her life.

Surely, she must have looked pathetic to Kiseki. Her appearance was really pathetic.

But Ouka could no longer bear the emotions.

She knew well how weak her heart was. For a long time now she knew that among the platoon members, she had the weakest heart.

There was no mistake that other members of the platoon were different from her.

They would face Kiseki with anger, try to persuade her, or oppose her.

But Ouka could only face Kiseki like this.

She could only bet her life and plead for her life.

“Please… don’t kill anyone else…!”

She begged single-mindedly. As to reach Kiseki with her own feelings, the feelings she tasted so far which made her heart nearly break, she begged her.

So that rather than her memories, her feelings reached Kiseki——

“……”

Kiseki stared in shock at sobbing Ouka’s face.

But before long, tears started to spill from Kiseki’s eyes as well.

As if responding to those tears, Hyakki Yakou wrapping around Ouka also shed tears.

Ouka’s feelings were pouring inside Kiseki.

It was because Hyakki Yakou was *connected to Ouka* in order to show her dreams.

“…Stop…”

Kiseki said in panic as she strangled Ouka.

They were flowing in.

Ouka’s feelings.

Her despair after losing her family, her feelings for her comrades and the emptiness from when she accomplished her revenge.

Gratitude for Takeru and the warmth have all flowed inside Kiseki.

“Stop, don’t cry…”

“Please… I beg you…”

“Don’t cry…!”

Kiseki was unable to stop her tears from flowing as she strangled crying Ouka.

Inside the dream, Saionji Usagi said this.

You can’t understand humans with just their memories.

Ouka’s feelings were truly a proof of that. One was unable to understand people just by looking into their memories. It was understanding the feelings of the person holding the memories that allowed someone to “understand” that person.

The sorrow rushing into Kiseki and her falling tears spoke of the understanding she held for Ouka.

She was able to understand how Ouka feels.

Ironically, the first human Kiseki was able to understand wasn’t her brother or “Takeru-kun”.

——It was Ootori Ouka, the person she hated the most.

“I don’t want to understand you…stop it…!”

Although Kiseki’s own experience was far more ghastly, she was unable to deny Ouka’s feelings.

It was because she felt sympathetic to Ouka that she was unable to constrain her tears.

“Stop… STOP IT ALREADYYYYY!”

Kiseki yelled with sorrow and frustration.

Being strangled even more strongly, Ouka finally resolved herself to die.

“Good grief, thee keepeth getting into trouble aren’t thee, Master. “

That’s when a voice resounded in Ouka’s ears.

Momentarily, an electric current rushed through Kiseki’s hands strangling Ouka and they let go of her.

When a very slight distance opened between them, a man appeared separating the two.

The man dressed in something that seemed like a red cloak had Ouka drop to her knees and on her back, then expanded a barrier.

“——!!”

Kiseki waved her arm and used Hyakki Yakou to crush Ouka.

The surging meat smashed onto the barrier causing sparks to scatter intensely.

Ouka had never seen the man before. She was unable to see inside his hood, but there was no one among her acquaintances with such a big back.

But she immediately understood who was he.

“…Vlad?”

“You idiot. I recall not taking fool as a master of mine, one who would throweth that her life away f’r her comrades sake. Knoweth thy shame. “

This preaching hoarse voice was without doubt that of Vlad’s.

It was completely different when she heard it with her ears rather than just having it sound in her head.

But despite the arrogant and horrible attitude, it was a low and gentle voice.

“Howev’r… ‘tis very much like thee. Thy heart is as vulnerable as ev’r. Weak. So weak yond it made me feeleth like I wast bringing up an infant.”

“……”

“That man… Kazuma also didst the same thing to protect thee. Thou resemble him to a most wondrous extent. “

Kuku, Vlad laughed throatily.

She was unable to see Kiseki’s appearance inside the wall of meat, but Hyakki Yakou tried to swallow Vlad and Ouka in the meantime.

The place they were in now was deep under the ground, most likely above and below them was filled with Hyakki Yakou. Surely, Hyakki Yakou that had a tremendous volume had converged all at once towards Ouka and Vlad.

Vlad was a Magical Heritage. When he used magic alone his magic power consumption was very inefficient, so his magic power would run out before long.

Ouka’s sanity returned and she stretched her hand to Vlad, but was unable to reach him as her body was still bound.

“Do not haste. Listen to me f’r a moment.”

“But at this rate…! Use my blood!”

“There is no needeth. T’s not enough to reacheth surface. Thou wishest to help thy comrades, am I right?”

Vlad stopped smiling and quietly exhaled.

“Do not worry. There is a way.”

His reliable back slowly rose up.

And Vlad stretched out his arms.

“——I shalt changeth mine own soul into magic power. There is no other way.”

Hearing that, Ouka grimaced.

“Don’t screw around…! There’s no way you can do t——”

“I can. A Magical Heritage’s soul is something born from magic power. And of course,

reversing the process is possible. It definitely isn't an irreversible process."

"You can't! I won't allow it! I am your master! Listen to what I say——"

"I won't hear it."

The strong declaration interrupted Ouka.

Vlad lowered his arms and looked up as if looking at the sky.

"This is fate. He hath lost his life and the next contract'r yond appeareth… wast his daughter."

"Vlad… stop this…! We'll somehow manage if you use my blood! You won't know unless we try, right?!"

"What of thy comrades if thou die? What about that brat. About that foolish demon girl. Thou wanteth to save, right? Everything that is."

Ouka's eyes were full of tears as she outstretched her hand.

Stop. Please stop it.

You can't do that, Ouka struggled.

"With this, I shall dispel mine regrets."

Vlad said with a sigh.

Heavily, very heavily he grit his teeth and spoke, as if spitting out his words.

"This is mine… atonement f'r not saving Kazuma. 'T was mine mission to stay by his side. Thy fate to seek revenge also traces its roots back to mine weakness…"

Ouka opened her eyes wide hearing Vlad's words.

He kept regretting the fact that he dissolved his contract with Kazuma. He felt regret that he let Kazuma leave Inquisition alone when Kazuma chose his family.

If he was able to protect Kazuma, Ouka wouldn't have become a vengeful demon.

That's what Vlad said.

"…You're wrong… that's wrong, Vlad…!"

Ouka finally understood what was Vlad burdened with.

"…Forgive me, Master."

Her stretched-out hand grasped nothing.

“Don’t go… who will scold me if you aren’t there… who will keep spitting curses in my ears…”

She clenched her teeth and still continued to stretch her hand to him.

“Please… don’t leave me alone…!!”

That’s when.

Vlad turned around and strongly embraced Ouka.

Strongly, very strongly.

“Thou art not alone. Believe in thyself, believe in thy comrades. Be noble. That will be thy weapon strongest of them all.”

“……”

“Even after becoming an empty husk, I will surely respond to thy nobility.”

“……”

“Farewell, Master.”

After he spoke his words, cracks appeared in the barrier.

It probably wouldn’t hold more than a few seconds.

There was only a little more time left for them.

Ouka’s eyes were full of tears.

What do I say. There’s surely something I want to tell him. Gratitude for countless times he helped her in the past, apology for hurting him so many times, and her happiness for how he accepted her despite the fact she wasn’t honest… also other than that there were many other things she wanted to say. It were the last moments she could remain with her partner.

But no words had come out.

Her emotions welled up, but no words came out.

Ouka slowly raised her face crumpled with tears and looked up at Vlad’s face.

At his not visible face, hidden inside the shadow.

“Don’t, go…don’t… leave me…stay by my… I don’t want to…”

Lose anything else.

What came out of Ouka’s mouth was only a wish carried by emotions.

Hearing those words, Vlad took off the hood hiding his head.

And while wiping Ouka’s tears with a large, thick finger,

“*Ouka*, thy blood——was more delicious than anything else in this world.”

——Smiling gently Vlad said his final farewell to Ouka.

Ouka's field of vision was filled with tremendous power and light.

She wailed inside of that light.

In her hands she held Vlad's *husks*.

In order not to forget him, in order not to let go ever again, she held them strongly in her hands.

She would not forget Vlad's face.

Surely, she would never forget that enveloping smile, resembling that of her father's.

Ouka opened her tear-filled eyes in the middle of the light.

Bearing the sorrow and nobility inside her chest she crossed the both guns in front of herself.

And——

"Summis desiderantes affectibus…!"

And spoke the words for walking together with him,

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

Wishing that they reach her partner, she unleashed them.

＊　＊　＊

After returning to the surface, Kiseki screamed unable to withstand the unbearable emotions.

She thought that compared to what she had experienced, the sorrow, anger and pain Ouka had experienced were nothing.

But the feelings that flowed from Ouka had squeezed Kiseki's heart powerfully.

At the same time, they made Kiseki feel incredibly envious.

Despite experiencing that much despair, the one who extended a helping hand to her when she fought all alone was Takeru.

And not just Takeru. There also were other comrades who supported Ouka.

Ouka's feelings for people precious to her have pierced through Kiseki's heart more than anything.

Because it reminded her of her loneliness to a painful extent.

Ouka who didn't hold any emotions prompting her to destroy everything was dazzling, beautiful, and made Kiseki envious of her.

"Why… that person is the same as Kiseki, but why only Kiseki is…"

When she spoke out her frustration, Kiseki realized that wasn't the case.

Wrong. Kiseki was the same as Ouka. It wasn't like she had nothing.

Takeru continued to stretch his helping hand to Kiseki. Even if his feelings weren't the same as her wishes, she had Takeru by her side.

It was selfish and self-righteous, but Takeru's feelings for her were honest.

——I will definitely make you happy.

He came to meet her and said the same thing over and over again.

She had someone who would walk by her side, just like Ouka had.

It was only now that she learned how happy that could make someone. She *learned that* through Ouka's feelings.

"Kiseki destroyed it herself…? She was the same as that person, but shook away Takeru-kun's hand…?"

She had broken all of it with her own hands.

She made a mistake in the Alchemist's First Research Center, when she reunited with Takeru.

If she took Takeru's hand, she wouldn't have become like this.

She would have become the same as Ouka.

Back then the one who was wrong wasn't Takeru, but Kiseki.

Allowing her desire to monopolize stand in front, it was Kiseki who gave up on everything.

If she took Takeru's hand, the despair Kiseki thought waited ahead, wouldn't have come true. She understood that well now, that she had received Ouka's feelings. Even if she received a human's body and was confined in a painful, dark prison, surely she would hold the same feelings as Ouka.

The world was cruel and might have not forgiven Kiseki, but Takeru would.

Takeru alone would have stayed by her side.

Even if he had comrades, even if he had Ouka, Takeru would never abandon her.

Because surely, everything precious to him was equal.

Kiseki understood that well with Ouka's feelings.

"And yet…!"

She had lost everything.

Kiseki struck the world into chaos, took away countless lives and was rejected by her brother.

If that was just it, she would somehow manage.

But because of Ouka, *regret* was planted into her.

It was the first time in her life that she felt regret.

She had never before regretted making the wrong choice in the past.

Embracing herself Kiseki looked around her.

There was nothing. She was all alone. All there was around her was red meat… she herself.

The emptiness she felt was dreadful.

At this rate the entire world would become her, and she will be all alone in the entire world.

“N-no…NO…I’m scared…help me…”

Kiseki raised her voice, trembling.

It was too late. All too late. No one would forgive her any more. “Takeru-kun” won’t forgive her either.

There was nothing but regret after what she had done. She would live forever, embracing regret over what she has done.

That was something she wouldn’t be able to bear.

“…help me, O-Onii——”

“——It’s not too late yet. People can redo things time after time again. Just like I have.”

A voice sounded from below.

Kiseki raised her tear-stained face.

When she did, she saw a red flash break through Hyakki Yakou-filled surface and fly high into the sky.

Slowly, *she* had emerged from inside the flash.

Spreading large wings, looking like the devil——Ouka once again appeared in front of Kiseki.

Around her, there were Mari, Usagi and Ikaruga all wrapped in a red spherical barrier.

Ouka not only escaped from that hell of Hyakki Yakou, but also found her comrades and brought them back to the surface.

She looked down at Kiseki, just a little angry.

“You have to choose, Kiseki. If you wish for destruction, I will reject you.”

“……hnn.”

“But if you wish to accept Kusanagi’s help…”

Ouka closed her eyes and retracted her anger.

And landing on the ground along with her comrades, Ouka,

“I——will protect you.”

Said this, and stretched out her hand to Kiseki.

Chapter 5 - And The Feelings Are Crushed

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There was no sorcerer in this world who would possess perfect immortality.

Those who pursued immortality always stuck to one theme, and one goal. Undead, vampires, puppeteers, devil worshipers, alchemists. Those who aim to acquire immortality generally pursue these fields.

The representative of the Alchemist, Suginami Suzaku who had achieved immortality through gene inheritance. Elizabeth who had used magic in order to fake herself as a true ancestor possessing perfect immortality. Kusanagi Orochi who embedded vampire cells in order to make himself a Dhampir. They were all wicked heretics.

All of them not only left the path of humanity, but were also unable to acquire perfect immortality.

Of course, this man too——

"——HAHA! As usual, your strength's like a joke!"

Using Dáinsleif intrinsic performance Haunted left slashes behind himself as he retreated by sliding on the ground.

Stretching something like a spider web of slashes, he desperately tried to open distance between himself and his opponent.

Haunted's head was covered with sweat, it spoke of how cornered was the man who called himself to be the one who manipulates death.

Even during the brief moment he was moving away, Hayato with the black gun in his right hand and the silver gun in his left had easily *crushed* the slashes remaining in the air.

——He completely ignored the slashes. Having his body completely clad in armor, Hayato didn't attempt to avoid and plunged straight into the slashes left behind by Haunted.

It was as if they had no effect at all. Hayato's defense was abnormal as he used two Relic Eaters at once.

After crushing the last slash, Hayato slipped underneath Haunted.

There was a eerie glint in his eyes as seen by Haunted from above. Haunted made a

twitching smile and increased his reaction speed by inserting magic power into his brain.

The brain processing speed acceleration magic equivalent to that of Soumatou's was magic ordinary sorcerers were unable to use. The very action of passing magic power through your own brain was very dangerous and required caution because of the vital points inside. Even a slightest mistake led to the user's certain death, so there weren't any sorcerers who would use it.

Most likely not even a first-class sorcerer would attempt to trigger it during battle.

The reason Haunted used this magic wasn't because he was a first-class sorcerer.

It was because he wasn't afraid to die. Even if he didn't succeed he still had his stock of lives so one or two deaths were nothing to him.

Whenever he uses this magic, he dies.

Hayato who slipped below had raised Caligula's muzzle against Haunted's chin.

Haunted who accelerated his brain processing speed had avoided Caligula's shot at the very last moment.

And although Haunted increased his speed slightly,

——*This was Hayato's normal speed.*

Hayato's silver gun, Maximilien was already pointed ahead of where Haunted avoided to.

——**bam*!*

The silver magic bullet fired from the Maximilien hit Haunted's abdomen.

The bullet Haunted received had scattered all the magic inside his body, including the magic that was increasing his brain processing speed.

Haunted clicked his tongue and faced forward.

——**kachik**

Caligula's muzzle was pressed against his forehead.

"——*Two thousand and thirty.*"

The meaning behind that count was the amount of times Hayato had killed Haunted over this short period of time.

At the same time Caligula's hammer was released, Haunted's head burst into atoms.

Losing his head he fell onto his knees and blood gushed from his neck like a fountain.

"Two thousand and thirty one."

Hayato let out a kick on the body right away.

Haunted whose head quickly reappeared was unable to react and received the attack.

He was blasted away from below.

"2032, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37."

Hayato's rapid attacks didn't stop. He continued to kill Haunted without giving him time

to recover.

Mixing shooting and melee attacks, he delivered death without pause.

His countermeasure against Haunted's immortality was simple.

Continue killing him. To kill Haunted more times than Haunted has killed humans so far.

Caligula and Maximilien. The characteristics of those two Relic Eaters were nothing but a nuisance to Haunted.

First, Maximilien was able to diffuse the magic power inside Haunted's body and cancel his brain processing speed acceleration magic. Next, was Caligula which caused a storm of mayhem. It was impossible to recharge it directly and immediately, but once it was fully loaded it took quite some time for it to be depleted.

On the other hand, Haunted's magic immediately recovered his body whenever he lost his life. Death reset his body to a perfect condition.

His atrocious immortality was possible thanks to the "Despair" ancient property allowing him to contract with certain magical organism. The magical organism requested a human soul instead of magic power in exchange for its support. Whenever Haunted lost his life, the magical organism provided him with a new body in exchange for a soul.

But whenever he was reset, he had no way to respond and was killed again.

Without Hero form he was unable to bear Hayato's attacks.

Hayato fired the fifth bullet from Caligula.

The total number of bullets Caligula held were five and Maximilien had to be reloaded every shot.

Continuing attacks with his body Hayato attempted to reload Caligula.

However——his attacks were stopped just for a second by a rose variant that appeared beneath his feet.

Furthermore——

"Don't get full of yourself, monster."

Haunted had quickly recovered and let out five consecutive thrusts with Dáinsleif.

He didn't thrust at Hayato himself, but at the magic bullets he was trying to load.

The magic bullets received the thrusts, were blown away and turning into magic power particles they disappeared.

Hayato tried to switch to reloading Maximilien, but the prepared magic bullet was also blown away by a thrust.

The initiative in the offensive had changed.

Haunted immediately activated Hero form and attacked Hayato with 《Berserk Enchantment》 triggered.

——However,

“Ngghh!”

“——?!”

The next moment, along with a growl Hayato had burst out of the roses constraining him and headbutted Haunted.

Hayato’s headbutt with the full body’s strength behind it caused Haunted’s head to burst, despite the fact Haunted was in Hero form.

Haunted backed down unsteadily having lost his head.

By the time his Hero form was cancelled and he fell to his knees, he had already recovered.

He shook his brand-new head and stared at Hayato displeased, meanwhile Hayato had leisurely reloaded Caligula and Maximilien.

《”…You should try harder, Haunted.”》

“…No, he’s just too strong.”

He ended up saying what he actually meant.

Although only mere five seconds passed ever since they locked in combat just now, but he was easily killed over a hundred times. These engagements between the two repeated many times already and Haunted lost over two thousand lives.

Told he was too strong, Hayato stretched his neck soundly, as if he was still just warming up.

“How many times more left, monster?”

Haunted made a bitter smile hearing Hayato’s question.

“No matter how many times you repeat this, it won’t work. How many people do you think I killed so far?”

“The only people that count to your stock of lives are probably those you killed directly with your magic.”

“……”

twitch

Hayato must have been correct, as Haunted’s smile cramped up.

“Moreover, you should have been killed countless times so far. Toughness is your only merit, I look forward to seeing how much death given by me you can you withstand.”

“B-being told that by a musclebrain is a bit… Still, this is unusual, it’s the first time I see you so motivated.”

The black rose that was restraining Hayato was torn apart and as he finished reloading, he performed a gunspin with his both guns.

“Of course. I’m angry now.”

The word “angry’ had completely shocked Haunted.

“That’s unexpected… is that so, so you’re angry.”

“It’s not just my anger. It’s two people’s worth of anger.”

Two people’s worth.

Just like Hayato told Takeru——“I will take your anger on myself”.

Haunted recalled that and a happy sparkle appeared in his eyes.

“Aww, here I treated you as a mere hindrance, actually, you are a hindrance, but is thaaat so! So you’re angry for Kusanagi Takeru’s worth! This is the first time an interest in you had sprung inside me!”

Delighted by Hayato’s anger, Haunted happily raised his sword.

“——If it’s you of now, there might be some worth in killing you!”

And his hair was ruffled as he expanded an enormous magic circle never seen in the past.

Generating lightning around himself Haunted spoke in language of another world.

【“Iä! Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young! O’ Black Goat of the Woods! Receive my sacrifice!”】

It was the despair magic property’s chant from a mythical world evil gods were dwelling in.

Hayato anticipated an alien threat to crawl out from the magic circle so he immediately fired Caligula’s bullet.

However, the bullet was blocked by a barrier that was erected. It was the same magic barrier that was expanded during mock battle tournament – the 《Number of the Beast》.

He tried firing with Maximilien, but only one piece of the barrier could be scattered. It was difficult to release as the magic circle and the operative procedure constantly flowed, moreover to break through it one had to take fire at all six hundred and sixty six pieces of barrier. It was difficult to break using Caligula that focused firepower in single blows, and Maximilien that had only a single shot.

The magic circle’s class was that of great magic’s. Most likely a type of summoning magic.

Hayato gave up on interrupting it, instead he reloaded his bullets and prepared himself to fight.

Whether it’s a demon or a snake that’ll come out, he was prepared. When the despair magic swept away and the chant of black blessing was complete, Haunted’s appearance in the center of the magic circle was revealed.

His form had changed.

He had the Hero form’s armor and on his head, he had an ominous mask reminiscent of a skull.

Furthermore, viscous magic power had filled his surroundings and let out eerie voices.

“Sacred Treasure Summoning, huh.”

With heavy tone of voice Hayato spoke the name of the magic triggered by Haunted.

There were three great summoning magics, the Hero Summoning which was impossible for a single witch to achieve, Legend Summoning, and the Myth Summoning. What Haunted used was a quasi-Myth Summoning.

Sacred Treasure Summoning, just as its name stated, allowed summoning of Sacred Treasures such as Mistilteinn, Lævateinn or Gungnir. While it was impossible to summon a Sacred Treasure completely even at expanse of the entire human race, it was possible if only temporarily.

With that said, although there was a time limit on it, it was said to require over ten thousand souls.

So how did Haunted devote that many sacrifices?

A foolish question.

《“Aaa-ah, you’ve used it… now there’s no going back, Haunted.”》

“Nhah! It’s fine! I need to pay respect to his anger and respond to it! Whaat, *I just won’t be able to die any more, that’s all!*”

In extremely high spirits, Haunted knocked the mask lightly with Dáinsleif’s blade.

Hayato squinted sharply.

“…So you used your stock as sacrifices.”

“I have concluded that it’s a price worth paying in order to knock you down to the depths of despair now that you’re angry! You have acquired qualification to become part of my dinner!”

Haunted spread his arms and made an exaggerated pose in his bone mask.

Nacht muttered “why the hell are you acting so high and mighty”, but it didn’t reach Haunted whose tension was maxed out.

Raising Nacht in front of his chest and taking a knightly stance, Haunted glared at Hayato.

“Think of it as of an honor. You are the first one in this world to fight against me in this form——”

“How convenient——now die.”

Interrupting Haunted, Hayato pulled Maximilien’s trigger.

Having his declaration interrupted as he faced forward with an exaggerated pose Haunted saw the magic particles floating around him converge.

Maximilien’s intrinsic magic, re-condensing the diffused magic power.

——And causing an explosion from it.

“Oh fuck, I forg——”

ot.

Light filled the place before he could finish.

All the magic power that was diffused so far had assaulted Haunted.

The silver explosion was so concentrated that the ground beneath had melted. Destruction as if that of a nuclear reactor core's explosion had enveloped Haunted.

"……"

Maximilien's empty shelling fell to the ground before it turned into magic particles and disappeared.

Although the scale was very small, the power was comparable to that of a nuclear explosion.

If one received such a thing and survived they would be——

"You monster…!"

Hayato growled, lowered his waist and at the same time the explosion had subsided, plunged towards where Haunted was.

At the same time, appearing from inside the muddy melted ground——

"THAAAaaaAATTT HUUUUuuuUUUUUuuUUUUUUUUuuuUUUuuUUUUURT!"

And raising a mad roar, Haunted jumped out from inside the molten ground.

Haunted's sword and Hayato's gun clashed in mid-air.

The fight between the superhuman and the monster still continued.

＊　＊　＊

Although it wasn't clarified how does a soul manifest in a Magical Heritage, but sometimes materials holding magic power appear to have personalities.

There was no one who knew the mechanism behind it. Even Magical Heritages themselves.

However, although not many, there were records of some Magical Heritages converting their souls into magic power.

The amount of magic power acquired in exchange for Vlad's soul was unimaginable.

Activating 《Vampire》, Ouka chased after the smell of her comrades' blood.

They were nearly a hundred meters underground and separated, she wrapped each of them in a barrier and brought them back to the surface.

What she received in exchange for losing her partner, were lives of her comrades.

Since her comrades were also connected to Hyakki Yakou, Kiseki immediately realized what happened. It was thanks to the fact that Ouka's feelings have passed through Kiseki onto the entire Hyakki Yakou.

Extending her hand, Ouka didn’t smile nor was angry.

She just stared at Kiseki seriously.

Kiseki took a step backwards while making a scared expression.

“…Protect Kiseki… that’s a lie…”

“It’s not a lie. You should know me already.”

“…I don’t believe it…”

“Then believe.”

“I might be a foolish and shallow person, but I will never betray your feelings. It’s because I already know you.”

Kiseki knew it already as well.

There were no lies within Ouka’s feelings, there was no resentment nor dislike towards Kiseki in them.

What there was in her, were compassion, empathy and desire to save Kiseki.

Seeing Kiseki scared of Ouka, Mari stared at Ouka.

“Foolish, shallow and impulsive at that.”

“…Don’t poke fun at me at a time like this.”

Ouka’s serious expression cramped up a little.

“How about you add that you’re stiff and cannot read the mood.”

“Even Saionji… could you stop that?”

Ouka rebuked Usagi who also jumped on the opportunity.

“……And she loves anpan?”

“——That’s no bad point of mine, c’mon, what’s wrong with you all!”

Back to normal, Ouka yelled at her comrades.

I’m trying to convince her here so stop getting in my way, while Ouka said that, Ikaruga took a step forward.

“Let me tell you this, I still hate you. I have no intention of protecting you.”

Ikaruga squinted and glared at Kiseki.

“I won’t forgive you for what you did. The world’s a mess thanks to you, and what I prepared for you is also a mess. I think it’s natural for you to be hated by the humans all over the world.”

“……unhh.”

She lifted her bangs and put in a mint candy in her mouth, then exhaled lightly.

“…But… well… I won’t laugh at you, I’ll spare you from that. The pain you felt was honestly, really harsh. I wouldn’t be able to withstand it if it continued for whole fifteen

years.”

“……”

“…It might have been unavoidable that you ended up this way.”

Ikaruga rubbed her right arm and averted her gaze from Kiseki.

What she experienced when she tasted Kiseki’s pain in the dream world, must have been unimaginable. Ikaruga didn’t apologize, but she did acknowledge Kiseki’s suffering.

“Suginami is just clumsy. Surely in the dream she must have instigated you, Kiseki-san, but she actually wanted to know more about you.”

“No, that didn’t happen.”

“You don’t have act all bashful now〜.”

Usagi poked Ikaruga’s cheeks, resulting in Ikaruga taking revenge on her by crushing her cheeks with both hands.

While the two messed around with each other, Mari stood beside Ouka and poked her with an elbow.

“So she does do good things from time to time.”

“Who the hell do you think you are…”

Ignoring Ouka who glared at her, Mari smiled gently to Kiseki.

“…This is how we are, we might not be reliable but no matter how much the world hates you, Kiseki-chan, we will never betray you. Most likely you are the most important person to Takeru, and we too… well, we like Takeru. We love him.”

Mari as she said that honestly and smiled with embarrassment, Ouka stared at her a little enviously, but did not try to stop her.

“But that’s that and this is this. Just like Ouka said, humans aren’t all about love There’s lots of other fun things. There’s as much painful things out there, but it’s not all bad things.”

“……”

“That’s why first… well, um…”

She scratched her cheek and then put a hand on her chest.

“…be my friend.”

Blushing slightly, Mari stared firmly at Kiseki.

Kiseki’s shoulder trembled slightly.

“…friend…?”

“Yup, friend. You don’t have any yet, right? Let’s become friends and talk plenty! Let’s do plenty of things together! I want to know more about you!”

Hearing Mari’s straightforward words, Kiseki’s lips trembled as she tried to say something.

But soon she calmed down and then spoke.

“…With Kiseki? When she has a body like this? It’s impossible.”

“It’s all right! There definitely is a way to return you back to normal!”

“Kiseki killed a lot of people, there is no way she can live a normal life… she turned the world like this…”

“——Even so, we can become friends!”

Mari said with her voice turning slightly rougher.

Her pupils shook as she spoke further.

“You probably know about me already, Kiseki-chan. Many people died because of me. And yet, I can be together with everyone like this… the dead probably won’t forgive me, but I put an effort to use my power to save people…”

“……”

“It’s not like you will be forgiven if you die. And it’s not like everything you destroyed will return. Certainly you did something terrible. But you had a proper reason for that. That’s why… that’s why there’s no reason for you to be alone.”

“……”

“…Even if the world doesn’t forgive you for being happy, I will.”

Overlapping her own sins with Kiseki’s, Mari let out all she had to say.

Kiseki had remained silent until now, but tears started trickling down her cheeks.

Considering it was Mari, who had committed crimes in the past, what she said must have reached Kiseki. Being told by someone else other than her brother that they’ll be by her side, had made her happy.

While Mari seemed to have been overcome by emotions seeing Kiseki’s tears, Usagi had popped up forward.

“If you become our friend, Kiseki-san, then how about I teach you how to cook? Do you know maybe what food Kusanagi likes best?”

“…I don’t… know…”

“Theeen〜, I will teach you once we become friends. Let’s make some home cooking for Kusanagi together!”

Usagi joined her hands as she proposed that and then made a broad smile.

Although she was still facing downwards, Kiseki embraced her shoulders more strongly.

Even Ikaruga who kept averting her gaze from Kiseki, had stood beside the others.

“…You don’t have to worry about your body. We can turn you back into normal human, but there’s an *even better method*. If you could continuously control Hyakki Yakou like you are now, that is.”

Kiseki slightly raised her head in response to Ikaruga’s words.

Ikaruga stared straight at Kiseki and while turning around a mint lolipop in her hands, she smiled.

“Who do you think I am? Just believe in the number one among Suginami, the outstanding Ikaruga-sama. I will surely convince the world.”

It was also the first time the platoon members had seen Ikaruga be this reliable.

When Ikaruga also accepted her, Kiseki’s trembling stopped.

Once again, Ouka took a step forward and extended her hand in front of Kiseki.

“——You are no longer alone. We’re with you.”

“……”

“I promise we won’t let you feel lonely.”

——So take my hand.

The hand Ouka extended was white, warm and seemed very soft.

＊ ＊ ＊

Kiseki stared at her own palm as she shed large tear droplets.

The activity of Hyakki Yakou around the world had already ceased.

The giant demon tree tower over the city started wither and turned into ash starting from its leaves.

And the ash covered the city like snow.

“……nhh.”

Kiseki looked up at the rain of ash in the sky.

She looked at the world for the first time.

She felt that her field of vision which was only focused on Takeru, had expanded a little. People other than Takeru were willing to help her. They were willing to accept the abnormal existence Kiseki was.

She was happy. Very happy.

Why hasn’t she noticed earlier?

Why hasn’t she tried to learn more about them earlier?

She looked only at Takeru, sought only Takeru, and drove the world to this.

She should have looked around her more.

She should have tried to learn more, much more about the world.

That this world——was not only cruel.

I was so foolish, Kiseki ridiculed herself.

While staring at the hand Ouka had extended in front of her, Kiseki has——

Moved away from Ouka.

“Kiseki?”

Ouka looked at her questioningly.

Kiseki raised her head and showed everyone a smile on her tearful face.

“…Thank you… but…”

Momentarily, Hyakki Yakou had converged beneath Kiseki’s feet.

Although confused, Ouka had moved away from the gathering Hyakki Yakou.

Ouka looked questioningly at Kiseki, asking what is she trying to do, in response to which Kiseki said,

“Kiseki… shouldn’t stay alive after all… she can’t live.”

Horrified, Ouka aimed Vlad’s muzzle——at the gathering Hyakki Yakou.

And without hesitation, she squeezed the trigger.

However, the stake was blocked and shattered by highly-concentrated Hyakki Yakou’s tentacles.

No matter how much of it was blocked, Ouka did not stop shooting.

The members other than Ouka had also realized what Kiseki was trying to do.

The gathered Hyakki Yakou would wrap around Kiseki, all the tentacles would turn sharp ——then Kiseki would turn all of them against herself.

Kiseki had *wished for her of death.*.

She, who wouldn’t accept death from anyone but her brother’s hand no matter how much pain she was in, had wished to die by her own hands.

And Hyakki Yakou had fulfilled her wish.

“This is for the best… I don’t want to hurt anyone else…”

Anyone else. Kiseki knew that these were just some pretty words.

It wasn’t “anyone else”, but “myself”.

It might have been just as Mari said, and the world wasn’t all painful things. If she had other people by her side, she might have been able to bear the weight of her sins.

But Kiseki was different from Mari.

All of this devastation was something she herself wished for. There was a crucial difference between Mari who didn’t want to kill, and Kiseki who wished to kill.

The weight of their sins was way too different.

It was too difficult for her to live on. She endured a variety of things, gave up on various things, gave up on everything. Kiseki was grateful to the comrades who gave her one more chance

But she couldn’t bear it.

This was Kiseki’s escape from her sins.

“…really, you…!”

The one who understood that best and was furious, was Ikaruga.

In anger she tried to moved closer to Kiseki.

But Ouka had grasped her shoulder.

Ouka shook her head and stared at Ikaruga.

“Let’s stop. This is all we can do.”

“What are you talking about now! If we let that brat die now——”

“——No. I’m saying we should *leave the rest to him.*”

She said and looked up to the sky.

Following her, Ikaruga and others also looked up.

Ouka smiled bitterly and welcomed the person coming from the sky.

Leaving behind a twilight-colored rainbow made from magic power, he descended making lots of noise.

“Geez… he always comes late.”

The man descended from the sky.

He must have flew in a hurry. Spreading magic power he recklessly swung his arms to gather strength and then——

“KISEKII————————————!!!”

He finally arrived in front of Kiseki.

——*whud*…!!*

The man landed in front of Kiseki while retaining his momentum.

That was when the magic was released.

At the same time he landed, the flames of magic power have enveloped the city with him as the center.

Flames emitted by 《Ragnarøkkr Enchant》 have absorbed Hyakki Yakou in the surroundings in the blink of an eye, and erased it.

It was instant.

In an instant Takeru had purified Kiseki’s surroundings.

It was so bright and powerful, it seemed as if it had wiped Kiseki’s sins clean.

All of it happened so fast, Kiseki could only stare at the sudden visitor in shock.

In an instant everything was taken from her and made as if it never existed, causing her head to turn blank.

The man clad in twilight flames had stabbed the sword into the ground and slowly stood up.

“…Onii…chan…?”

Unable to see his face behind the armor, Kiseki timidly called him.

The next moment, Ouka who stood behind him fired a stake that forcefully canceled the knightly armor.

Standing there, was without doubt Takeru.

Kiseki’s Onii-chan.

Her brother stood up and in front of Kiseki.

“——Sorry, I’m late.”

And Takeru apologized to her with a serious face.

It was always like this. Whenever he visited her he apologized with “Sorry, I’m late”.

The situation was completely different, she was trying to commit suicide just a moment earlier and yet,

Just by hearing those words… Kiseki was relieved.

Right after apologizing, he looked down at Kiseki with anger.

“I don’t know what were you tryin’ to do, but don’t disappear in the middle of a quarrel. I still haven’t told you everything I wanted to.”

“……”

“And I didn’t get my answer yet, so stop running away, dumbass.”

And he lightly chopped her head.

There was no pain, but dumbfounded Kiseki naturally raised her hands to her head.

No matter what she tried to say, no words had come out. There was also no Hyakki Yakou around her to reflect what she wanted to say.

Her head was empty, blank.

She couldn’t think of anything.

She could only stare at Takeru’s face, dumbfounded.

While Kiseki dazed off looking as if she had just woken up, Takeru frowned angrily, but soon his expression changed and he smiled bitterly.

He lowered himself and matching Kiseki’s height, he brought his face closer to hers.

“Hey, Kiseki——do you love me?”

“It doesn’t have to be as your brother. Do you love me as “Takeru-kun”?”

Kiseki didn’t know what meaning did that question have.

And yet she felt pain in her chest.

She was in so much pain she couldn’t bear it.

Hunching over and squeezing her fist against her chest she answered while bearing her tears.

“……
I do… I love you…”

Hearing the answer, Takeru squinted quietly.

He didn’t smile, he wasn’t embarrassed, he just narrowed his eyes sadly.

“I see… but I’m sorry… “Takeru-kun” that you know no longer exists.”

That definitely wasn’t a rejection.

But it didn’t mean that he accepted Kiseki’s feelings.

Takeru tried to convey something to her.

“Standing here is your onii-chan. In the past he might have been “Takeru-kun”, but now he’s your onii-chan.”

“…o…Onii…chan…?”

“Yeah, that’s right. You called me that earlier, right. “Onii-chan”, that is.”

Seeing his gentle expression Kiseki felt really sad.

She wasn’t rejected. She wasn’t accepted.

However——*she was dumped.*

“I can no longer be——a “Takeru-kun” just for you.”

Tears trickled down from Kiseki’s eyes.

While crying, she moved away her hand from her chest, bit her lower lip and squeezed her fists at the height of her waist as she endured the sadness.

“Takeru-kun isn’t… here any more, right… he doesn’t love Kiseki…”

“……”

“He… hates Kiseki now, right…?”

She said while sobbing like a child.

Although she herself wanted to be hated by Takeru, but now despite feeling unsightly, she still said it.

Kiseki’s beloved “Takeru-kun” was nowhere to be found.

He won’t come back again.

She got what she deserved. She knew that.

Although she knew that, she didn’t want to know and thus, she couldn’t help but ask.

“I don’t know because he’s gone, but there is one thing he has to say.”

Kiseki raised her face and opened her eyes in surprise.

It was because tears were flowing down Takeru’s cheeks.

The tears had come from remembering the past and the feelings he had lost.

“The past me… loved you. He loved you, and not as a brother. There is no doubt about that… my first love… was you, Kiseki.”

First love.

Takeru too, was Kiseki’s first love. As a child, Takeru didn’t understand that.

As he matured, he had realized that Kiseki was his first love.

Kiseki was happy from the bottom of her heart that their feelings were the same.

Takeru extended his hand and touched her tear-stained cheek.

His hand was very warm and gentle.

“Some time ago… I asked you whether you were happy when you learned that I’m your brother and you’re my little sister, right?”

“……Yes.”

“I was happy back then. But I was also sad. Being related by blood with you made me happy and sad to the same extent.”

Kiseki understood Takeru’s feelings to a painful extent.

When she was told by Takeru that they’re siblings, there was only sadness inside Kiseki. Knowing that she shared that sadness with him made her spill even more tears.

“I’m sorry to notice it this late.”

“……”

“…It’s way too late.. but I’m your “Onii-chan” now.”

“……”

“And now——I love you as your “Onii-chan”.”

Takeru’s tears also overflowed without stopping.

These were all the feelings he had for Kiseki.

Sibling love towards his sister.

He might not know what kind of emotion was love, but he couldn’t find other word to express what he felt towards Kiseki.

They might not have spend enough time together to call it love. Saying that love didn’t need time was just a self-deception. Parents and children, siblings, they all spend time together.

But——

——His feelings of wanting to protect this bond couldn’t be expressed in any other word than “love”.

“I’m sorry, Kiseki… we were quarreling so Nii-chan lied. No matter what you do… I would never… kill you.”

“……”

“There is no way I could come to hate you. Even if you destroyed the world and killed my comrades, I wouldn’t hate my one and only, precious family.”

Takeru stroked Kiseki’s cheek and continued to shed tears.

“That’s why please… don’t stop being my “little sister”.”

He expressed his feelings to Kiseki.

“Don’t die… don’t kill… don’t go anywhere…!”

He revealed all his feelings and wishes to her.

“——Stay by my side forever… I can’t live without you…!”

This was all.

It was Takeru’s incredibly selfish, egoistical and obtrusive wish.

Until the very end, he forced his wish on her.

Despite being rejected time after time, he continued to wish it.

Mari said that the one to change had to be Kiseki. That’s why Takeru could only continue wishing. Continue forcing his wish on her.

This was Takeru’s way to quarrel with her. He might be beaten up, hated and rejected, but he could only continue forcing it on her. He could only continue to wish.

What Kiseki wished for was his past self, knowing that she wants to die with his past self he forced Kiseki to be his “little sister”.

He wished that she be his “little sister”.

He wished that she lives.

To put it in pretty words——she was his precious and beloved family.

There was no other reason than that.

And this wish——

“Oni…i…”

This wish has finally.

“Oni…cha…”

Has finally——reached Kiseki.

“——Onii-chan…!”

Kiseki accepted him not as “Takeru-kun”, but as her onii-chan.

In order to retrieve the relationship she thought they wouldn’t recover.

Takeru spread his arms in order to embrace Kiseki, who jumped into his chest.

And the moment he clenched his teeth seeing his wish come true and tried to receive Kiseki with tears in his eyes.

At that time, Takeru and the others heard the voice of destruction.

A voice that seemed to be right beside them, although that wasn’t the case.

——Now, let’s begin the hunt, Innocentius.

Far in the sky. Standing on the branches of the giant demon tree there was a white shadow

holding a white gun.

There was no time to act horrified. It was as if the shadow was there right from the start, they never noticed when it appeared.

The bullet fired from the white muzzle was an invisible bullet of exorcism.

An abominable bullet of evil which dominated souls.

Takeru tried to protect Kiseki at the same time he caught her in his arms, so he hid her behind his back.

The invisible bullet slipped through Takeru's body and,

"————Ha…aa…!"

Pierced through Kiseki's chest.

First she backwards, and then hunched holding her chest.

Takeru had her lie down on the side and then touched her back.

"——!"

Forgetting about the white man who attack from surprise, he slowly put Kiseki down and embraced her.

Her body was incredibly cold.

Cold like ice.

"Kiseki! Open your eyes… Kiseki!"

He shook her body, but there was no reaction. It felt like an empty husk.

"It can't be…"

Takeru was in shock as he held Kiseki in his hands.

The fact that immortal Kiseki didn't breathe caused Takeru's thinking to stop.

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Ouka started acting instead of confused Takeru.

"——Saionji, Suginami, protect the two! Nikaido!"

"——I know!"

Ouka spread her wings and Mari materialized the rings on her legs, then the two took off to the sky all at once.

The enemy was that white shadow——Ootori Sougetsu.

The culprit behind everything, who watched over them calmly.

Sougetsu looked at the world while shouldering the Relic Eater "Innocentius".

He put a hand on his chin while the wind had rocked his hair.

“Hmm. The schedule went a little crazy, but I’m glad I made it in time. Still, I’m not there for a moment and this happens, huh. Kusanagi-kun didn’t kill Kiseki-chan and didn’t become a god hunter.”

Sougetsu furrowed his eyebrows and pat his shoulder with the gun’s barrel, then opened mouth making a cat-like smile.

“——This won’t do. It’s troubling me, you guys.”

That’s when Sougetsu looked at the incoming Ouka and Mari for the first time.

Ouka retracted her elbow and accumulating magic power, she had a pile-firing mechanism appear on it.

Mari accumulated magic in her both arms and bent her body as much as she could.

“《Vampire》!”

“《Aurora Canon》!”

They fired their magic in a suicidal attack.

Sougetsu didn’t try to avoid their attacks, he just stood there calmly.

The two magics hit him directly. The blast and shockwave blew off the entire branch of the demon tree and scattered its remnants in the whole area.

Ouka and Mari stared at the very location they attacked, waiting for the smoke to clear.

There was response, it hit——but they knew that’s meaningless.

Knowing Sougetsu’s identity, they were certain they can’t beat him.

Just as they predicted, Sougetsu was floating inside the smoke as if nothing happened.

And had not a single scratch.

“Woah, that was amazing. To think you’d come at me with full power despite knowing my identity… what would you do if I actually died?”

Sougetsu shrugged and smiled wryly.

Ouka and Mari maintained a battle posture as they confronted him.

He was in front of them, but didn’t feel real. It was always like that. He had a presence and they knew he was there, but it felt like a lie.

His presence was dyed with lies.

Ootori Sougetsu had always exuded that kind of atmosphere.

“Don’t worry. I cannot be killed by this world’s magic. With that said, I can’t be killed physically either. And thus, you cannot kill me.”

””……””

“I would like to praise you for your struggle but… by the way, Ouka, what happened to Vlad?”

Sougetsu asked, mystified.

Ouka didn’t answer, she ejected magic power to move and assaulted Sougetsu.

She swung her fist upwards and hit him with 《Vampire》. Then had stake firing mechanisms appear on both her arms and rushed at him again.

Intending not to give him any time to rest she attacked to pierce him full of holes, but Sougetsu not only didn’t receive a single scratch, he didn’t even receive any impact from the attacks.

Or rather——the attacks had no effect at all.

“Oh, I see. So you used Vlad’s soul as fuel.”

“——!!!”

Ouka’s face was stained with anger, she increased the speed of her attacks.

But it was for naught. There was absolutely no effect.

Before long, Sougetsu finally stopped Ouka by lightly receiving her attack with his hand.

Her rush stopped, all of her movements stopped.

“No, I’m not saying you did bad. Well done, if anything. That thing was made from my power… a Magical Heritage like no other, y’know. But it ended up manifesting a soul after receiving influence of its contractor. When I give my power to someone else, it ends up capable of acting by itself under someone else’s influence… that’s what Relic Eaters are.”

He closed his eyes while he pushed back Ouka’s fist.

“These things were originally part of my power. Something that was made by having me insert my power into guns I had Alchemist make. That’s why I have the control over all Relic Eaters. Of course, Mistilteinn aside.”

“Damn…!”

“That why I was kinda annoyed by the fact they manifested souls. Vlad was especially difficult to handle. Ouka, it was a great help to me that you erased him. You have dad’s praise.”

“——Shut up! Don’t speak of my partner!”

Ouka kicked the side of Sougetsu’s head from the right side, but he stopped it with one arm as if it was a fly.

Squinting, he mocked Ouka.

“Partner… so you deepened your bond with it so much. You might not be connected by blood, but you’re incredibly similar to Mineshiro.”

“You killed him! My father, and Vlad too!”

“Heey, I didn’t kill Vlad?”

“It’s the same thing!”

The very cause of this tragedy, from beginning to end, was this man.

She had no idea for what reason did this man want to destroy the world, and was not interested. She also knew she can’t kill him.

But there was something she understood during combat. What he revealed, was that all the Relic Eaters were part of this man’s powers.

There was a need to ascertain what kind of performance did the Relic Eater’s prototype, Innocentius have.

They might find a method of saving Kiseki.

Having her right arm and right leg restricted, Ouka looked towards Mari.

“——Nikaido! Aim for the gun!”

While they couldn’t kill the person himself, the Relic Eater wasn’t an immortal existence.

Mari, who continued to look for a chance while Ouka attacked, had gathered magic power on the tip of her finger.

“《Aurora Bullet》!”

A magic attack concentrating intensively at one point. Even if its attack range was narrow, it could penetrate through any magic.

The emitted light bullet flew straight towards Sougetsu’s Relic Eater.

——Her aim should have been perfect, but Sougetsu who should have been there and the Relic Eater have disappeared in a blink of an eye.

“He’s gone?!”

“——Behind you!”

Mari turned around at the same time Ouka screamed.

And there, was Sougetsu’s face, laughing like a Cheshire cat.

“——!”

“Innocentius isn’t immortal. Your aim was good… but, you are misunderstanding what kind of existence I am.”

Mari instantly gathered magic power in her both hands.

However,

“I’m nowhere in this world, and at the same time I’m everywhere. That’s the kind of thing a God is.”

“Ha——ugh!”

“Got that?”

Innocentius’ muzzle bit into Mari’s chest, her body bent forward.

And then, the silent shot was fired from the muzzle, piercing Mari’s body with an invisible bullet.

Mari trembled as if an electric current ran through her, and then started falling.

“Nikaido——!!”

Ouka flew towards Mari at full speed.

But——ahead of there, Sougetsu appeared from nowhere as if he was already waiting there.

She suddenly stopped and leaned backwards.

He was nowhere, yet was everywhere.

As long as they were in this world, they had nowhere to escape.

“She’s not dead. Both Kiseki-chan and Mari-kun are all right.”

“…You…!”

“Innocentius performance is——*Order the Soul*. As long as you hold a *human soul*, you cannot escape it.”

He bent his waist and peeked into Ouka’s face.

“I didn’t order her to suicide. You don’t have to worry.”

“……nghh.”

“The order I gave her soul is——”

Sougetsu disappeared from in front of Ouka.

Behind where Sougetsu disappeared from, she could see Mari raise her limp body.

However, there was no vitality in her movements. Ouka tried calling Mari.

But then, Sougetsu whispered into her ear.

“——Was to kill you.”

Sougetsu’s presence had immediately disappeared from behind her.

Mari stretched her body and turned towards Ouka.

She was expressionless, it was as if she was wearing a mask and she looked at Ouka.

“…Nikaido…”

Ouka couldn’t feel relieved that Mari was safe.

She knew what order Mari was given, but couldn’t act.

Mari moved first.

Rotating the flying rings at her feet, she flew towards Ouka at incredible speed.

“——!”

In panic, Ouka crossed her guns in front of her to guard herself.

“《Aurora Enchant》”

Enveloping her fist with magic, Mari smashed her fist into the guard with all her strength.

Vlad didn’t have any noteworthy defensive performance, but current Ouka’s physical strength and vitality were equivalent to that of a True Ancestor’s. A normal attack shouldn’t have caused her any damage.

And yet Mari’s fist had destroyed the stake firing mechanisms on both Ouka’s arms and had enough strength to break her guard.

Mari, who should have no noteworthy bodily strength, had blown away Ouka with a punch. It was all thanks to the enchantment magic’s power. That’s just how powerful her magic was.

Ouka immediately opened distance between her and Mari, then concentrated magic power in her both hands.

“Stop it, Nikaido! Get back to your senses!”

Her persuasion was ignored. Ouka didn’t know whether that was because of Order the Soul, but her voice didn’t seem to reach Mari.

Directing her expressionless face towards Ouka, Mari converged aurora magic power right under Ouka’s side.

“《Aurora Canon》”

Indifferently speaking the magic name, Mari attempted to release the magic from zero distance towards Ouka’s abdomen.

As long it’s magic, Ouka’s Vlad could pierce it.

Pierce it and diffuse the power——

…Vlad…!!

She realized just how great was Vlad’s presence. In order to pierce through magic, Ouka had to know the opponent’s operative procedure.

Aurora magic’s operative procedure was complicated, but Ouka had it inside her head.

However, what was most important was reversing the operative procedure in her head. And that was Vlad’s job.

Ouka built up an operative procedure at high speed and reversed it.

She fired a stake towards Mari who was hoarding magic power.

In the nick of time she was able to blow away Mari’s magic bullet. It was possible to stop the magic from activating if the stake hit the gathered magic power directly.

Although she did manage to react in time, Mari was overwhelmingly more proficient when it came to operative procedure construction speed.

“《Eclipse Blade》《Helios Blade》”

Ouka did not know the operative procedures for this magic.

She only knew the data that was left about it in literature. It was an existence akin to a fairy tale, the magic properties of “Sun” and “Moon”.

Mari swung her hand wielding the swords made from magic power.

Ouka rebuilt the two pile bunkers on her arms and projecting a stake, she received Mari's swords on it.

"——Ng-ghh…uhh…!"

She was pushed back by the tremendous power.

As long as Mari used an ancient property different from Aurora, Ouka was unable to penetrate it. And with the similar amount of magic power, Mari's magic quality was greatly higher. Moreover, 《Vampire》 couldn't be continuously rebuilt.

《Vampire》 had cracked and was at verge of shattering.

"F-forgive me!"

As a last resort, Ouka kicked Mari's belly with all her strength. Although she restrained the power in order not to kill her, Mari should have several ribs broken.

Staggering, Mari moved away and then held her abdomen with her hands.

She could have screamed in pain, but she was expressionless.

What should I do…! Nikaido will chase after me if I try to escape… she'll continue trying to kill me until she dies…!

If she tries to destroy Sougetsu's Relic Eater, she'll get done in by Mari while she searches for the man.

She was also worried about Takeru and Kiseki on the ground but… still, dealing with Mari came first.

Ouka closed her eyes tightly, then once she determined herself she opened them.

Once again crossing her arms, she made the pile bunkers appear.

It shouldn't have infinite duration… even if her soul received an order, as long as I can knock her unconscious…!

Ouka determined herself——to fight Mari.

"I didn't want to fight you like this…"

Frowning miserably, Ouka entered combat readiness.

Mari expanded a huge magic circle behind herself and took a posture for interception.

"I definitely——won't let myself be killed by you!"

Ouka challenged Mari in order to protect Mari's conviction of not killing people.

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After giving the order to Mari, Sougetsu sat down on the giant demon tree's branch and looked down on Takeru and others.

He smiled bitterly while lightly stroking Innocentius.

“That was some splendid destruction… but I didn’t think that Kusanagi-kun would manage to persuade Kiseki-chan.”

That boy just won’t act like I want him to, Sougetsu thought and heaved a sigh.

“I’d like to stare as you act in confusion for a little longer, but it’s about time to end this game.”

To Sougetsu, war was just a *hobby.*

Eradicating magic… or rather, eradicating gods was the reason Sougetsu was born.

Half-human half-god, living god.

Loki.

He was called with a variety of names, but before this world was reconstructed killing gods was the meaning of his existence.

It would have been better if he was just a weapon. After Sougetsu killed the gods, the previous human world would have survived after the victory.

The reason the meaning of his existence has become “destruction”, was because half of his body was that of a god. If gods were to perish, then so had the humans.

It wasn’t like this conclusion had come from his feelings.

Everything Sougetsu had consisted of was completely convinced that’s how it had to be.

In the previous worlds Sougetsu had annihilated the gods, but at the same times he incited humans’ destruction.

As a result, the human an the gods’ worlds have collided, giving birth to this new world.

The worlds didn’t perish and had survived, moreover, seeing the “world-view” of the gods and humans mixed together——Sougetsu rejoiced for the first time in his life.

I can continue destroying, he thought.

“Yup. It was fun.”

Sougetsu stood up and overlooked the world from on top of the branch.

The red-stained world on the other side of the horizon was beautifully reflected in his eyes.

After taking a huge detour, Sougetsu reached destruction.

The reason he took such roundabout path to destruction, was to enjoy it.

When the worlds collided and the power of the gods scattered all over the world, Sougetsu’s powers as a god had also scattered.

——And that was this world’s “Magic”.

Sougetsu’s power that scattered all over the world wasn’t almighty. At most, it created some undying witches. Relic Eaters were a remnant of Sougetsu’s powers as a god, it

could be said they were very diluted. That’s why it was impossible for him to use Innocentius to give Takeru’s soul a direct order. It was because Takeru’s soul was not that of a human. There was a constraint on Sougetsu’s powers as a god.

Therefore, Kusanagi Takeru wasn’t the one he should drive into the corner of destruction, it was the people around him.

If Sougetsu takes away his precious people, Kusanagi Takeru will surely direct his intent to kill towards him.

For that sake Sougetsu went out of his way to make him comrades, had them experience joy and sorrow together.

However, to have Takeru become a God Hunter and have him kill Sougetsu himself, he could just use Innocentius on Kiseki causing her to destroy the world, then kill his comrades. After being forced into a situation where he had to kill Kiseki, and learning that Sougetsu was the culprit behind all of that, he would kill Sougetsu.

Sougetsu knew that humans were creatures as simple as that.

He knew, because he was half human.

“This is lacking drama… those humans just won’t move. If possible, I didn’t want to use a tasteless method like this.”

This was a magnificent game where he used his restricted powers as a god in order to lead the world to destruction. Sougetsu greatly enjoyed this world which had rules he had no part in making of.

If possible, he would like to continue it forever, but he couldn’t do that.

As if to put the world to a closure, Sougetsu raised his bangs.

“If one enjoys destruction, they have to destroy or there’ll be no point.”

The world’s destruction, chaos, he tasted plenty of it.

The only thing left was obliterating it into nothingness, that was the only enjoyment left for Sougetsu.

In other words——destruction.

“Now, mr. Second God Hunter, I need you to kill me without hesitation so——*I’ll prepare your soul for that.*”

Like usual, Sougetsu smiled like a Cheshire cat and squeezed Innocentius’ trigger.

The order he gave to Kiseki was——devour the world.

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After lying Kiseki’s ice-cold body on the side, Takeru put his ear against her chest to listen to her heart.

There was no sound of it. She wasn't breathing either.

Takeru paled and single-mindedly tried to give her a cardiac massage.

Ikaruga ran up from the side and caught Takeru's shoulder.

He raised his head in daze, and received a slap from Ikaruga.

"Get a hold of yourself. Look around you, Hyakki Yakou hasn't disappeared. This girl is still alive, and even if she dies she'll just resurrect."

"…b-but she doesn't breathe…!"

"It's that Relic Eater's fault. What you have to do now, is to destroy that scum's Relic Eater."

Scolded calmly by Ikaruga, Takeru regained his composure.

"I don't know what power is at work here, but she'll go back to normal once the Relic Eater is destroyed. There's no time to daze off here. Do what you have to do."

She wrapped his cheeks with her both hands and touched his forehead with hers.

"I don't know how should you fight that damn scum… but what you have to do has been decided. Got it?"

Ikaruga's glaring stare forced Takeru for squeeze his trembling lips.

"Please leave Kiseki-san to us! Kusanagi, you have to go to Ootori and Nikaido now!"

Usagi embraced her gun and ran up to Takeru.

That's right… it's not over yet…!

He stood up and nodded strongly to the two.

"…Lapis!"

"Here."

Responding to his call, Lapis showed herself by his side.

"Do you know what's the performance of that bastard's Relic Eater?"

"My apologies. Innocentius' performance and personality are unknown."

"What about Ouka and Mari?"

"…It appears Mari-sama has been affected by Innocentius and is in combat against Ouka-sama."

Takeru grimaced and looked up at the sky.

Certainly, he could see red and rainbow light clashing against one another.

Even without being told to, Lapis connected Ouka and Takeru through magic communication.

《"Ouka!"》

《"Kusanagi…?! Nikaido was affected by the Relic Eater…! We're in combat now!"》

《“What happened…?!”》

《“Innocentius’ performance is something that gives a direct orders to others’ souls…! Nikaido’s soul was ordered to kill me…!”》

Hearing that, Takeru decided to head immediately to support Ouka.

《“Leave Nikaido to me! You take Ootori Sougetsu’s Relic Eater——!”》

A huge rainbow-colored explosion happened in the sky and the communication was interrupted.

“……!!”

Takeru forced down the feelings that prompted him to head straight to where Ouka was.

She said to leave it to her. What he had to do now, was destruction of the Relic Eater.

Do what you have to do! Everyone had decided that!

“Let’s go, Lapis!”

He resolved himself and called Lapis.

However,

“——Kusanagi! K-Kiseki-san is…!”

Called by Usagi, he turned around.

There——was Kiseki floating up as if defying gravity. At the same time as she raised her body in the air, she slowly opened her eyes.

Direct orders to others’ souls, is what Ouka said.

In other words, Kiseki was——

“Everyone, ru——”

Before Takeru could finish yelling, Kiseki’s deafening scream had resounded.

Momentarily, Hyakki Yakou overflowed from every part of her body.

What Takeru saw, was Ikaruga protecting Usagi with her own body and Lapis who reached out to him.

——Host!

At the same time Lapis’ voice was swallowed up by Hyakki Yakou, Takeru too was swallowed by the wave of demons.

Epilogue

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In just an instant, Hyakki Yakou swallowed everything again.

A person whose soul was dominated showed not even the slightest hesitation. A body was merely a tool that executed the instruction given by a soul.

Hyakki Yakou in Kusanagi Kiseki's vicinity was temporarily erased with the 《Ragnarøkkr Enchant》, but what accumulated inside her body grew infinitely.

It wouldn't stop until it devoured the entire world. Kiseki only focused on eroding the entire planet with Hyakki Yakou.

Inside the sea of Hyakki Yakou——Lapis Lazuli searched for Takeru's whereabouts.

They were separated when the demons have overflowed from inside Kiseki.

Normally she would be able to appear beside him anywhere and anytime thanks to their contract's bond, but since they were covered in Hyakki Yakou, she couldn't reach him.

《"————Host."》

She attempted magic communication but it didn't reach him. She wasn't made for searching but she deployed some FM-bits to search for him, but they were devoured by Hyakki Yakou.

The reason Lapis was safe now, was because she was necessary to Sougetsu.

Most likely Takeru was also safe.

The problem was with Ikaruga and Usagi.

Considering she couldn't do anything by herself, Lapis gave priority to Takeru.

It's not over yet. Recalling the feelings she received from Takeru by the end, Lapis repeated it to herself.

It's not over yet… surely, everyone is safe…

She had no basis for that, but praying that is the case she continued to search for Takeru.

She needed to search for him in some way. Lapis was unable to scatter away Hyakki Yakou by herself. She attempted to move her body by turning it into particles, but even if she changed her body into tiny grains she was unable to pass through high-density Hyakki Yakou. Considering she could not move independently in the sword state, she could only move in humanoid mode.

Although she tried twisting her body with all her strength, Hyakki Yakou wouldn't budge. Her legs sank into the irregular sticky swamp-like mass.

Were Usagi and Ikaruga… really safe in this situation?

Lapis wasn't affected by the erosion, but those two…

——*No. I should act instead of thinking.*

She struggled, struggled for Takeru's sake.

If those two die, Takeru will despair. Lapis knew well that everyone was just as important to him.

Lapis too, was possessive. It's because she wanted to monopolize him that there was part of herself who wished for their souls to fuse. She unconsciously erased the memories Takeru had of his comrades and urged him to activate the God Hunter form.

It was her nature as a Sacred Treasure and it couldn't be helped, but Lapis herself did not want to snatch Takeru away in that manner.

That's why she resisted her own qualities as a Sacred Treasure.

She also spoke of it to Takeru's comrades.

The 35th test platoon…

"……"

Suddenly, she stopped moving for a moment. Lapis thought not only about Takeru, but also about the platoon members.

The relation Lapis had with the platoon members was very weak. She had no interest in comrades and they treated her as Takeru's weapon.

Lapis only looked from beside Takeru. Before they realized, she was there and it could be said that she was treated like air.

She has never felt lonely before.

She was happy as long as she was by Takeru's side.

At first she could only wonder why was he together with that noisy bunch. They struggled for point acquisition, laughed, yelled at each other… until she re-contracted with Takeru she thought it was all silly and ridiculous.

However, Lapis loved looking at Takeru whenever he was with them. She loved looking at him from the side as spoke with other members while looking genuinely happy.

There was a scene that has remained in her memory even now.

During the after school platoon activities all of them walked in the Antimagic Academy's school corridor, she watched their appearance from behind.

Even before Lapis had become a proper person, she had a moment where she thought she would like to watch them like that forever.

To think of it, that might have been the trigger that caused her to acquire a human heart.

While recalling that scene Lapis started moving her body again.

I will… bring Host back to that place… that is my mission.

In order to bring back that sunset-dyed corridor.

Not even one of them can be missing… I won't let that.

In order to see that scene again.

Those girls are necessary… both to Host, and to me…

She couldn't abandon them.

Everything for Host's sake.

No, everything for her own sake.

If I repeatedly turn into particles and rebuild myself I might be able to move small distances… let's try it.

Lapis didn't give up and continued to try escaping.

《 "——You've really grown to stink like a human, Mistilteinn."》

From the other side of the Hyakki Yakou she had seen, she heard an awfully clear voice.

When Lapis who intended to swim through the sea of demons had raised her face, a space had opened in front of her.

Or rather, it would be more correct that a barrier had forcibly opened free space.

In the center of it, floated a cracked-up sword.

And overlapping with it, was an illusion of a white woman.

"…Gungnir…"

Lapis called her name.

The other Sacred Treasure whose whereabouts were unknown after the battle with Orochi, had appeared in front of Lapis.

From among the ones Lapis knew of Gungnir was the only Sacred Treasure that retained some fighting capability despite losing her contractor.

However, seeing as it had cracks on it, without doubt it must have been partially destroyed just like Lævateinn.

She should have lost most of her performance, aside from her magic power.

Since there was no knowing with what intent has she appeared, Lapis didn't lower her guard. If Gungnir has come to get in her way, Lapis decided to resist with the few magic power she could muster.

However, Gungnir's illusion has approached Lapis and quietly closed her eyes.

《"Perhaps, for this moment… Orochi has had you deepen your bond with Kusanagi

Takeru.”》

Being told something that meaningful, Lapis was puzzled.

Gungnir continued with her eyes closed.

《“The situation requires urgency. I have very little time left.”》

“……?”

《“No need for needless dialogue. I will only relay to you what is necessary.”》

She paused there, opened her eyes and looked at Lapis.

《“I’m thinking of entrusting it to you.”》

Then the azure-colored girl asked.

Entrust what?

And the white witch had responded to the question.

《”——The power to save the world.”》

Mistilteinn——has received those words for what they meant.

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Afterword

How did you like the twelfth battle of a bunch who can’t read the mood?

It’s been a while, Yanagimi Touki here.

This work has finally entered the climax and even though there was was a battle against Kiseki this time, this volume had few combat overall.

Hey you, yes you who’s thinking “what are you doing, reducing battle time at this point in the story”!

I’m sorry, I’ve hoarded lots of that stuff and I’ll go all out next time. I intend to put various stuff in there, so forgive me.

Now, twelfth volume.

It was full of talk about love despite the fact world was being destroyed.

Although I wrote a little about how the girl called Kusanagi Kiseki is inside, but this was the first time I properly described her mentality.

Reminds me of the time when each volume focused on one character. Ouka in the first, Mari in the second, Ikaruga in the third, Usagi in the fourth, Takeru in the fifth, and Lapis in the sixth volume. Seventh, eight, ninth, tenth and eleventh were full of chase after sub-characters and the main story. The twelfth volume is finally the time the Kiseki comes into the focus.

I have been placing Kiseki and the Hyakki Yakou as a very important factor in the series and made her to be like a last boss, but I kept writing about her with intention of making her an ordinary and naive girl deep inside.

My intent was to make Kiseki so normal, that Takeru will seem much more broken in comparison. The two share Kusanagi’s stubbornness and inflexibility since they’re siblings, but Takeru is much more abnormal.

Also, this was the first time I wrote about Takeru’s “love and such”, heck, it might even have been the first time I had him say that word. This series should have few love comedy moments, I still wrote plenty of it for the girls, but I hardly touched on Takeru’s matters of heart.

It was unexpected… no, actually it might not be. Well, that’s just how the first love often is.

I myself avoided the romance parts (it’s one thing that I’m not too good at it, but it also doesn’t fit the story) as I’ve written this, but I haven’t written about it as clearly in the previous series and one before that.

That’s why, well, this is my first time.

It was the first time I have written a scene where the protagonist hears out a girl's confession and properly gives her answer.

Whenever I write about Kiseki, it turns out like that. Somehow, even when I wrote the scene of Kiseki and Takeru confronting each other my brush had stopped moving.

I have already written plenty embarrassing scenes so far and made lots of sick characters, but the scene where Takeru exposes his feelings for Kiseki was incredibly embarrassing to me for some reason.

I think it varies by person, but when I'm writing a story I do my best not to "self-project" myself onto characters. I do read those sometimes, but I never write them. As for the reason behind that, if I self-projected myself onto the characters, they would all turn into bunch of assholes.

The human being I wrote in that would be the closest to me, would be Tenmyouji Reima. Takeru, Ouka and others are far different from me. It's just that I stuff the ideals and what I lack into the characters.

But, "thinking well about it, isn't this self-projection as well?", is what I've recently noticed. Isn't that a bit like parents who raises his kids to be different than they are? That's also self-projection if I'm not wrong. That's why, I guess… is why I become strangely embarrassed. It's similar to when I noticed that "I'm a chuuni" during puberty.

Also, they're siblings right. That must be it. No wonder it makes me embarrassed. They say that the only ones who go for imouto moe are they one's without a little sister, don't they. I think that's exactly the case. There were plenty of people among those who worked on anime and they said they don't understand imouto moe.

If I felt romantic feelings towards my sister… there are few people who would think of such things. I like immoral things, but in reality it's, y'know right? Real little sisters and little sisters in anime, light novels are completely different beings.

No, I wonder about that? Aren't there cases where they're really cute and you get along with them really well? Since I wrote things in fashion of a forbidden love between siblings, and it's my self-projection, then possibly I have feelings for little sisters… wooaah, I ended up thinking of having such a relationship with a real sister, daaamn, this feels weird what do I do? I can't look at my imouto's face now, this is horrible from a decency's point of view. I thought such things despite the fact I don't have a little sister myself, and yet I ended up writing stuff like this. Which is probably the worst part decency-wise——is what I noticed just now.

I have nothing but little sisters in my head now.

Yes, today I've gone disgusting in a different way from usual.

Boobies? The recent trend are shoulder blades. It's difficult to say who has the best boobies in this story, but Kiseki surely has the best shoulder blades.

——There's no doubt about it since that's what I say.

This time I have nine pages for the afterword, so I did my best to write useless stuff.

This work has finally entered the climax.

Next volume will be the last. Well, there's one more short story volume in plans so that actually makes two volumes, but the next one is the last story volume.

In recent years it's gotten quite difficult for light novels to continue stably as series. With that said, people who are involved in writing books always had it hard so I'm kinda late to say that, but it still is much stricter than it used to be.

Under such circumstances, I think the "Antimagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon" " was a very fortunate story. It had excellent editors-in-charge, wonderful illustrator, comic series and was even animated.

Around the eight volume I was finally able to tell "this is all I have left to do with this series".

There was a time during the anime's planning when I have opened plenty of free time and readers have been fretting "Are you writing?" and such. Well, it's true that there were some unexpected twists and turns. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.

However, the work on anime had extended and there were changes in original story's schedule.

That is because this series was scheduled to be completed on the tenth volume. When anime was in the works and I wrote it while planning to end it on the tenth volume, it felt like it was a good time to do it.

But the animation work took more time and I was told they would like me to continue a little longer. As an author, I was very happy to be told that.

And when it turned out that I continued onto the eleventh volume my "this is all I have left to do with this series" had changed into "what can I do with this series?". Working at ease at times like these doesn't really happen. But I had a lot of fun every day thinking "what should I do".

It was a really blessed world. Quite lucky one.

And above all, the fact I could continue it like this is all thanks to the readers who have been with me this far.

You might think that I always write the afterword's acknowledgements reluctantly, but that's not the case at all. I mean, although all authors write acknowledgements by the end of their afterwords, we all write them wholeheartedly. I don't know how is it about acknowledgements for people involved in work (laughs), but any author puts their heart into thanking the readers.

Thank you very much.

And if possible, please stay with the "Antimagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon" "… the name's so long, both the title and the series are long, but please stay with until the very end.

What's left are the short stories, right. I'll probably write about what happens after the main story, so look forward to it!

It’s not over yet, but since it’s a long afterword, I wrote my thanks to everyone. It would be great if I could write about characters in the last volume’s afterword〜. But at times like those it’s usually just two pages of afterword.

Well then, next volume’s last. What about the last boss? What happens to Kiseki? Will everyone in the 35th platoon be safe? Die, haunted. The twelfth volume was full of chatter making you ask that, but most likely it’ll all settle in the last volume!

Enjoy yourself to the very end!

Now, acknowledgements.

The editors in charge whom I always inconvenienced, K-sama and S-sama.

Kippu-sensei who did his best to draw wonderful illustrations despite being busy.

Yasumura Youhei-sensei to whom I am indebted for the comic version.

Everyone in the Fantasy Bunko’s editorial department.

Silver Link’s anime staff who did their best despite not having much time.

The cast who did their best to play each character perfectly.

And all of you who have taken the series in your hands, you have my sincere gratitude.

It’s finally the last volume (how many times are you gonna write that?)! What awaits Takeru and the others is——!

Stay tuned! Well then, let’s meet in the last volume!

Yanagimi Touki

Yanagimi Touki

Debut work: “量産型はダテじゃない！” (Production Model is not just for show!)

Twelfth volume. I sure did well writing this far, even if I do say so myself.

“Everything so far had gone just as I planned!” is something I won’t say even if you force me to, but all the boobies so far are just as I planned them to be. Heck, isn’t volume twelve devoid of boobies? They’ve been swaying back and forth in the anime and yet… please do take care of this twelfth volume.